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The Black Cat

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Write this circle at the **beginning** of and you will have **Ed**

By letting the circle remain **open** it will be a **hook,** and this **hook** stands for **A.** Thus will be **Ad.** Add another **A** at the end thus and you will have a girl's name, **Ada.**

From eliminate the initial and final strokes and will remain which is the Paragon symbol for **O.**

For the **longhand** which is made of 7 strokes, you use this **one** horizontal stroke

Therefore, would be **Me.**

Now continue the **E** across the **M,** so as to add **D**—thus and you will have **Med.** Now add the **large** circle **O** and you will have (medo), which is **meadow,** with the silent **A** and **W** omitted.

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JUST HIS LUCK

By LOUISE RAND BASCOM

The love story of a man who never has had time to "look 'em over," and who is under the unusual strain of having a rival who is also his business competitor.

HEN Dunreith Cary left the Yale Forestry School he knew a pine grove from an apple orchard, but nothing whatsoever of love. Since experience with Cupid counted little in business circles and since he belonged to a clannish family, it seemed perfectly natural to have his aunt's husband's cousin proffer him a job with the Grice Lumber Company, which straightway sent him out to sell what was left of an oak tree after it had passed through the mill. He liked the work. There was considerable satisfaction to be derived from talking to the bull-necked contractors and wizened lumber yard owners, and he knew joy when he had an oportunity to re-forest the Company's denuded tracts or to pass estimates on land which some tired tax payer had offered for sale. Indeed, he was more than ordinarily successful in judging the number, kinds and quality of trees on a given acreage, and two years of proven accuracy in guessing at board feet and tan bark possibilities constituted the reason for his exit from the Jacksonville Limited at the little watering station of Salonica at nine A. M., June the fifth.

Towering above the coatless, expectorating loafers and scratching mongrels clustered about a battered truck, Cary for a moment watched the great engine under the dripping yellow tank, and then turned to look for the hack which was to convey him thirty miles into the Blue Ridge Mountains. Beyond a little mound inhabited by the railroad agent's imported prairie dogs, he saw an ocean of red clay mud half engulfing a toppling vehicle attached by strings, ropes and remnants of harness to four flop-eared mules.

The newcomer paused where cinder walk met bottomless thoroughfare and raised his voice to call, "Huckleberry Hollow?"

"Um-huh," came the tobacco-tinged response. The driver waited a moment for his passenger to wade to him, but as the firm-jawed young man merely clung to a big tan bag without moving, the mule-guider finally whipped up his animals and drove near enough for Cary to toss his luggage among the curry-combs and halters on the hack floor and scramble in beside the other passenger.

"Trunk?" drawled the manipulator of the greasy lines.

"No trunk," replied Cary, and before the words had covered the space between himself and the unshorn mountaineer, the speaker found his hand grasped by the slim fop at his side.

"If this doesn't beat Panama," cried his seat mate enthusiastically. "Why, Dun, you've got so good-looking I'd hardly know you. Plenty of rouge and black to the eyebrows, what?" The man paused and peered closely at Cary. "Just think of Providence giving you a make-up like that! Why you're a regular chorus man, sonny. How'd they happen to drop you in this mud-hole?"

"I'm off to the mountains," Cary responded with none of his interlocutor's ardor. He had never liked Abe Prewer in college and he felt less regard for him now that he worked for a rival who continually managed to foil the Grice Lumber Company's plans. "Just a short trip."

"Huh," murmured Prewer, attempting to shield his knees from splattering mud by holding up the much worn lap-robe,

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"Huckleberry Hollow, you said. I bet that means Tom Stevens offered you folks his Rye Shoals land. What'd he ask for it, fifteen?"

"I'm not sure," parried Cary. "I'm supposed to find out what it's worth."

"Me, too," sang his companion, "but I know that without looking. It's worth about three dollars. In fact, he sold us some next door for two-fifty. Not worth more'n that, I know."

"I haven't seen any of it," returned Cary, mentally reflecting that the land must be worth at least seven dollars if Prewer was trying to get him to bid on it at less.

"I'm on to every inch of this country," boasted the other man, fumbling for a cigarette. "This is more a vacation for me than anything else. I'm tired of flies and city odors. Thought I'd come sit on a mountain porch for awhile and get my breath. Don't need to do anything till the eleventh. Got a date then with old man Hill down in Atlanta. Say, you fellows never sell him anything, do you?"

"No," acknowledged Cary shortly, almost thrusting his hand toward his breast pocket as if to protect the letter there. Even as the hack jolted past negro cabins and persimmon trees he could see the bold, black typewriting on the greenish letterhead of J. W. Hill. The brief message thereon, *"Will see you at* 11 *A. M., June* 11*th."* had exhilarated him when he read it, for Mr. Grice had announced more than once that the man who pulled an order from "that old Atlanta grouch" was worth a managership to the firm. Now he, Dunreith Cary, the youngest man with Grice, was to have a chance; and all the way down on the train he had dreamed of his glory when he should wire the firm to send J. W. Hill a trainload of KYZ or MPH. The firm had so long ago given up trying to land the Atlanta dealer that Cary had not been instructed to approach him, but it had occurred to the young man that inasmuch as he was to be so near the thriving southern city he would make a try at Hill on his own account. With this in view he had spent six hours composing a letter which had brought back the curt note he treasured.

"Funny," broke in Prewer. "Hill has such a whopping big concern I'd think he could afford to buy from all of us. He opened four new offices this year—Galveston, New Orleans, Columbia—"

"Oh, he has the business all right," acknowledged Cary, "but he'll have none of us. Ancient grudge of some sort, I believe. We don't even try for him any more."

"Tough," commisserated Prewer with tantalizing complacency. "He's the best customer we have."

The mules had left the red clay now and were ascending into the sandy loam of the mountains. Sometimes they passed a cabin with gourd martin houses swaying on tall poles, again they climbed beside some rushing stream hemmed in by coral-cupped kalmia and azaleas of all shades. Cary could feel the air growing cleaner and fresher and wished he could get a draught of it without inhaling the execrable cigarette smoke of his companion, but this did not seem possible unless he walked and they had just reached a spot where springs from a huckleberry shaded bank gushed out and ran down the right of way until the mules' fetlocks were immersed in crystal water. Seeing the condition of the road Cary decided to keep his patent leathers clean for a bit longer and had just subsided into a contemplation of the twisted cotton "gallouses" before him when Prewer exclaimed, "Hello—now what?" and jumped over the wheel.

Cary stuck his head beyond the bumping hack standards and observed three dejected women standing about an expensive touring car. Just as Prewer approached the little party with panama uplifted, the mules concluded that the silent blot in the road was an automobile and therefore to be shunned. Their simultaneous plunging called forth the driver's utmost skill and dexterity, for it was impossible to pass without falling into a deep, ferny ravine at the right, and the high bank at the left defied scaling.

"Git aout and ketch hold them thar leaders," commanded the hack's pilot. "They'll split their fool selves ef that thar thing starts."

Cary, glad to desist from inaction, ran to the mules' heads as he was ordered and stood soothing the big, rawboned creatures while Prewer talked to the ladies. From where Cary stood he could distinctly hear the conversation.

"How'll it be for me to take a look at the thing?" queried Prewer in his easy manner. "I don't promise much, but I know a steering wheel from a horse collar."

"Oh, if you will!" cried the eldest of the ladies, wiping some huge tortoise-shell spectacles. "This was such a crazy thing for us to do—starting off to the mountains by ourselves this way."

"But I know how to drive a car," put in the tall, brown haired girl, "and I know how to change tires. Somehow I never thought of anything else happening. You needn't look at the gears—I didn't strip 'em. The old thing just stopped."

The other girl made no comment. Suddenly she turned and glanced at Cary, and he found his hands trembling on the mules' bridles and his breath coming in absurd little gasps. She was slight without being slender and her hair had the lights of autumn hickory leaves. In her delicately rounded face appeared the soft, pinky colors of the blossoming kalmia. Altogether she looked as sweet and fragrant in her light gray suit as did the huge bunch of white azaleas which she carried in her arms. "Damn," said Cary inaudibly. He was not swearing at the girl, but at his lack of automobile knowledge. Why couldn't he have been the one to go forward and lift his hat, he savagely demanded of himself.

"It serves us right," said the brown-haired girl again. "We just decided to run off. Miss—er—ah—Smith, who was visiting me, happened to remark she'd like to go to the top of the Blue Ridge, and so we just started. Hardly took time to pack our clothes. We just—mercy—don't tell me you've started it already!"

Little squeals of approbation and delight mingled with the noonday hum of the bees and the insistent cries of warmed up crickets. The car glided forward. At once the mules backed violently with the grim Cary clinging to the leaders' bits. When the snorts of the animals became only semi-occasional and nothing but the disturbed murmur of the woods fell on Cary's ears, he started back to the hack.

"Hello," he hazarded, tumbling in, "where's Prewer?"

"Who that thar tuther feller?" spat out the driver. "He got in with them thar women folks."

Cary made no rejoinder, but a feeling of nausea surged over him. Women had never appealed to him other than so much furniture. Educated entirely at boys' schools and without any sisters to drag him into society, he had met only the girls whom his friends had brought to track meets and glee club concerts, and after saying, "How d'ye do" and "It *is* a warm day," he had fled ignominiously to the gymnasium or library, thankful that he would never be introduced to the same damsels again. After securing a position with the Grice Lumber Company he had been travelling too constantly to get acquainted with any women and now—now he had seen one who had made him feel as if he could uproot trees to reach her, and that idiotic Prewer with his smug little mustache and fancy waistcoat had leaped upon the inside track. It was sickening!

The slow scrambling of the mules and the driver's continual "You, Maude—git up thar, Lou," finally became intolerable. Cary swung himself over the mud-caked brake block and strode up the shadow-flecked road. Though he knew the car must be miles ahead, he strained his eyes to see through the leafy bends. More than once he fancied he heard the throb of the engine and increased his speed eagerly only to find his ears had tricked him. With all his heart he hoped the machine would balk beyond coaxing so that he might give his seat in the hack to the ladies and tramp behind with his eyes upon the girl who had so upset him, but he was destined to reach Huckleberry Hollow without seeing any more than the unswerving, grooved track of the car.

When the mules panted to a stop before the long rose-covered veranda of the summer tavern, Cary's glance swept the gos-

siping ladies on the porch to no avail. He did not see her. Considering his mud-stained shoes and wilted collar, he was rather glad that *her* eyes were not watching his assault upon the clerk's desk.

He drew the register toward him confidently only to be arrested by the clerk's suave, "Very sorry, sir; we've nothing left. An auto party took the last rooms we had a trifle earlier."

For several heart beats Cary stared at the scarlet cravat before him, and then said quickly, "Oh, that's all right. Mr. Prewer and I are together. Just show me up to his room."

"Er—er—very well," stammered the clerk, ringing a call bell. "I didn't understand." With slow precision he took a key from its nickeled hook and handed it to the waiting darkey. "Twenty-nine, Sam. I think Mr. Prewer has gone out," he added to the new guest.

"I'll get a nap before he comes in then," returned Cary, following the boy up the green-carpeted stairs; but when the hop had dropped the bag and fumbled with the curtain cord until he had been tipped and dismissed, Prewer's unsolicited room-mate did not appropriate the bed. Instead he tilted the mirror to the light and carefully inspected himself. For the first time in his life his collar looked unnecessarily large to him; the blue of his suit now appeared a hideous off-shade, and his hands were none too well cared for. When his searching gaze had assured him of these things, he spent an hour shaving, manicuring and brushing up, and then went down upon the veranda. Restlessly he paced back and forth, his eyes wandering from lily pond to golf links, and from links to arbor seats, but the party he sought was nowhere visible. Finally he gave it up and strolled down to the little tree-dotted village to find the livery stable and post office. After he had several times walked past the whittling idlers he discovered a big red barn, and ordered a saddle horse for the breakfast hour next morning.

When he returned to the hotel, people were at supper and to his chagrin he noted that Prewer was seated with the automobile party at a table for four. The azalea girl wore a light blue dress that was soft and spready, and poor Cary thought she was more adorable than ever as he gobbled his meal in order to reach the lobby before her. Luck was with him until he left the dining room, and then the stubbly chinned driver who had brought him from Salonica approached like an inexorable monster.

"The boss 'lowed he'd made a mistake about that thar hoss he promised ye," he said, pulling his tattered hat farther down over his watery eyes. "A party come in that wanted two hosses fur tomorry, and the boss 'lowed the gray you pinted out'd better go with her team-mate."

"Well, that's all right," observed Cary, attempting to edge the monster toward the veranda. "I suppose you can give me something else?"

"You kin have Bill," offered the man. "He's some hoss, Bill is. Not a trick to him, Bill hasn't, 'ceptin' he shies purty bad and kicks now'n then."

The stableman waxed quite loquacious concerning Bill, and by the time Cary extracted himself from the fellow's clutches, the party he sought had vanished. The proceeding reminded Cary of attempting to catch a train in a nightmare. Forlornly he wandered about until dusk and then he went sulkily to his room where he stared out at the sky. It was filled with stars, and great white clouds were rushing past them with kaleidoscopic rapidity. A soft breeze rustled the leaves of the nearby chestnut trees in whose branches katydids were chanting lustily like innumerable choir boys on keys of their own improvising. For a long time Cary stood facing the night. At last he went to bed. Two hours after he should have been asleep, Prewer banged in.

"'Lo, Dun," he jerked out gaily, pulling off his coat as he crossed the room. "The clerk told me you were rooming in twenty-nine. Glad you thought of it. Hated to leave you so sudden-like this afternoon, but after the ladies busted their magneto connection they wanted a man along. Thought the wire might drop off again."

There was a slight pause, and then Cary cleared his throat awkwardly. "I'd like to meet your ladies, Prewer," he said.

"Birds? What?" laughed Prewer. "I'd introduce you, Dun, if I knew their names. That's the truth. But I don't know who they are. They call one another Miss Smith, Miss Brown and Miss Jones. I gather they're swells who're trying to get out of the limelight for a bit. At least they're scared stiff for fear they'll run into somebody who knows 'em and get in the papers."

"I don't care what their names are," burst out Cary, trying to keep the thrill of excitement travelling up his spine from reaching his voice. "I'd just like to talk to 'em."

Prewer's shoes bumped upon the mat-tinged floor. "Under the circumstances I don't like to bother 'em too much running my friends in on 'em, but I'll be glad to arrange it if I can," he promised unctuously. "That brown-haired girl's some queen, what? The other's not much, but—"

Cary turned over and bit his lip in order to keep from knocking Prewer's head off, for Prewer, to Cary's knowledge, had never bestowed so much as a glance on the brown-haired girl. Nothing more was said, and finally when the talking in the halls had ceased, Cary slept. The last streaks of the lemon-colored dawn sent him eagerly to his wash-bowl. He was surprised to find that his room-mate had gone.

Otherwise Cary was the first person downstairs. As quick as he could get some ham and eggs he went to look at Bill, and found the powerful beast pawing up quantities of turf by the vine-covered hitching post. The forester untied the crude bridle reins, refixed the throat latch, and prepared to mount. No sooner had he thrust his booted leg across the ragged saddle than Prewer's voice, soft and lazy as his white flannels, drifted down from the veranda.

"Good looking black, Dun. Almost makes me wish I was going with you."

Cary gazed back sharply, and saw Prewer sitting on a hickory bench inserting maidenhair into a bunch of white sweet-peas. "Don't tell me you got up at this outrageous hour just to hunt flowers," he charged.

"I didn't exactly hunt 'em," acknowledged Prewer. "I've been here before, you know, so I was on to the old woman that grows 'em. I had to walk a bit for the ferns, though."

"Humph," muttered Cary, and rode off over the dew-spangled grass.

It would never have occured to him to make a florist of himself and he hated Prewer doubly for his cleverness. All day long Cary toiled in blackberry brambles and through dense growths of sassafras and chincapin bushes making estimates and planning a logging road; but when his neat figures blackened his blue-covered notebook he saw in their place nothing so prosaic as board feet—only the picture of a girl in gray carrying an armload of azaleas. What a sweet-looking girl she was. How refreshing it would be to come home to her after a hard day. It seemed to him that he had never known anything but the marble-topped tables of cheap boarding houses and now he experienced an unaccountable longing for something else. Women could do such wonderful things with a little what-you-call-it—chintz, that was it—chintz and white paint! Only he, of course, would spread on the paint. It would be a pleasant thing to enamel doors and window boxes and things in off hours. If he could land J. W. Hill it would be possible to settle down in one place and plan bird houses and kitchen tables the rest of his life. The Grice Lumber Company recommended a particular grade of lumber for kitchen tables.

Scratched and sun-burned, Cary at last hopefully cantered back to the hotel, only to find himself again unlucky. There was a dance that night, and as he knew none of the new steps, he walked the veranda weltering in shame. Why didn't he know what other men knew? From time to time couples floated out past him to cool off before the next number, and once Cary caught a glimpse of the azalea girl wearing Prewer's sweet-peas. The sight filled him with caveman bitterness and he sneaked off to his room. How did it happen cheap skates such as Prewer could manage to slide into a woman's favor? Why didn't he himself know enough to walk up to her masterfully

with a glib excuse and bear her off before Prewer's astonished eyes. He fell to dreaming of himself in such an heroic role, a dream which kept interrupting itself with bitter reflections. Why had his school days taught him nothing useful—such as how to be introduced to the girl he meant to marry?

The following morning Prewer was fitting luscious, crimson June apples into a quaint home-made mountain basket when Cary picked up the reins on Bill's fine neck. "Aren't you ever going to do any work?" demanded the horseman.

"Told you I was here on a vacation," responded Prewer, holding off the basket for a better effect. "I know what the old land's worth. You'd better take my estimate and have some fun here. There's a golf tournament on to-day."

"Don't play it," snapped Cary, and loped away.

A newly vacated room gave Cary opportunity to remove his bag from Prewer's quarters. Otherwise matters continued unchanged. Try as he would, Cary could not seem to be in the same spot at the same time as the azalea girl, and it was quite apparent that Prewer had no intention of making any introductions that were not forced upon him. Had Cary been more experienced or hated Prewer less, he would have crossed the dining room to speak to his rival on some pretext or other, and so obtained the introduction he craved, but he did not do it.

In consequence, he wore almost a savage frown on his face as he returned from work on the afternoon of the ninth. The ninth! He repeated it over and over like a man with a wrong safe combination which he hopes will miraculously turn into the right one. The ninth! Poor Cary realized despairingly that if he kept his appointment in Atlanta he must leave the next day. If he left the next day he would never, never see the azalea girl again, and the thought of her then or at some future time perhaps receiving Prewer's kisses caused him to squirm with rage. Imagination ran riot until he felt cold in spite of the sun, which appeared unequal to drying out his sweat-dampened shirt.

While he was engaged in these most melancholy thoughts his horse was following a narrow road overlooking a magnificent view of distant turreted mountains and a bright valley patchwork below where different colored soils and crops dovetailed. Drawing rein he gazed down at the peaceful scene in the hope that it would quiet the turmoil within him, but before the ache eased there came a blast of a siren whistle, a whirr of machinery, and a green roadster shot by chased by a curling cloud of dust. Surprised, Bill whirled, started some stones rolling on the edge of the road, and then began to sink under a silent crumbling of the breastworks. For a moment the great horse clung frantically with his fore feet to the firm ground and in that instant his rider threw himself over Bill's neck to safety. Before a good breath was possible the handsome beast was rolling over and over down the slippery, slanting rock, struggling against every inch he lost.

White with anxiety Cary jumped from the road and slid after him. Would the huckleberry bushes beyond the long smooth rock stop the velocity of that horrible descent or would the big beast crash through them and fall over the cliff below, Cary wondered as he clambered down the steep slope half praying, half cursing at his inability to do anything but shout encouragement. The projecting ledge reached, Bill fought stubbornly to brace himself on the worn, rounded pathway of some ancient water-fall, but his impetus was too great and, helplessly, he slipped from view over the cliff. Avoiding the ledge, Cary ran around the side and dashed down the almost perpendicular incline, falling and grabbing at bushes to steady himself in his mad race. Half way to the bottom he came across an old Indian trail, and there, jammed against a mossy hemlock log, lay the crumpled Bill. When Cary saw he could do nothing, he sat down on the log and sobbed like a woman. It was not so much the loss of the horse that hurt, although he was fond of animals, but rather the fact that it was the last trying episode in an unsatisfactory week. After tearing himself to tatters and wearing out his

mental works on the Rye Shoals land, Stevens had met him at Buzzard's Fork an hour previously to say that he had decided to sell his land to the government after all, so that not only had four days been wasted in a business way because Stevens had been canny enough to make them examine without giving an option, but Cary had also killed a good horse, and failed to get in with the girl he meant to marry. So, because everything seemed so futile, he cried there beside the dead Bill while two catbirds jeered at him from a young tulip tree and a long snouted razorback grunted through the leaves behind him.

In the midst of his misery a sound rose above the racket of the catbirds, and without looking, Cary realized with fear that it was the voice of the azalea girl.

"Oh—oh," she cried, "are you hurt?"

Cary tried to brush away the tears with his sleeve as he sprang up, but evidently he was unsuccessful, for Prewer, who was with her, laughed. "Kind of drizzly, Apollo, what?" he grinned. "Dope out your troubles," he ended, more commiseratingly.

The moment the azalea girl opened her curved lips, Cary's impulse had been to lay his head against her knees and blurt out everything, but Prewer's words brought from him the brief, "Just an accident." Without looking at either of the newcomers, the unmounted man mechanically started down the trail, only to be arrested by the girl's imperative:

"But are you hurt?"

"No—oh, no," he said, turning. For a brief instant his eyes blazed into the compelling blue ones regarding him, then he was gone. As he walked he raged. It was just his luck. Why, of all persons, did those particular two have to come upon him? And why—when he could not remember having wept in his life before—why had he taken that occasion to lose his control? Women did not like to see a man cry. Society from the beginning had inculcated the belief that masculine tears denoted weakness. Weakness—and to *her* he longed to be a very god of strength. In silent fury he kicked at the stones in his path and went to his room with no supper. Indeed, he could not bear to face her now. It was bad enough to walk the floor and plan how it might have been different.

The next morning, rather weary, he rose to mail a letter before packing his bag, and as he ran listlessly down the green-carpeted stairs he saw her at the little rattan writing desk alone. At first he pretended that he did not know she was there, but when he reached the door he found he could not go out.

"Any letters to mail?" he asked, wheeling to face her.

She rose quietly and came toward him. "I've just been writing a letter to my dad," she said. "Perhaps we could walk to the post office together. I actually got up to see the sunrise this morning and I'm so proud of myself I had to tell Dad."

"It *was* pretty," acquiesced Cary.

As they passed down the pine-edged driveway she made him tell her about the accident. "I couldn't sleep last night," she confessed. "The thing took such a hold on me. I looked for you everywhere after supper to make you tell me about it, but I couldn't find you."

"I had a hard day," mumbled Cary, "so I turned in early." Her sympathy was so sweet that he almost asked her to marry him on the way to the post office, but when he lifted the tin flap on the door so that she could slip in her letter and by chance saw the name on the dainty envelope, he was not sure he could ever ask her. Who was he to think of the daughter of a millionaire?

"I'm glad to have had this little walk with you," he said, as they strolled back past a sprawly, sheet-iron garage and a diminutive yellow butcher shop, "because I'm going to-day."

"Going!" Her voice echoed his in regretful amazement. "Why—why I supposed you were here for all summer and—and I thought I'd surely find a way to meet you soon."

The intimation that she wanted to know him started the tremors up Cary's back again, but he said, "There was Prewer."

"He said you couldn't be dragged to

meet a girl at college—" She stopped and chuckled at the remembrance of one of Prewer's stories regarding Cary's dislike for objects feminine. "And then—"

"Then what?" persisted Cary, with reddened ears.

"You seemed so sort of aloof and not-want-to-meet-you-like that—"

"Um—" groaned Cary.

"Do stay over a little while," begged the girl, "till we've—we've had a ride or something, couldn't you? My friends are mad about mushroom collecting and I can't get interested in it. As a result—"

"Will you drive with me this afternoon if I stay?" demanded Cary boldly.

The girl stooped and picked a feathery pink flower by the hotel gate and tossed it away. "A fig for Mother Grundy," she stated. "Yes, I'll go."

The words brought a wave of happiness over the big fellow at her side and yet there was uneasiness too. If he drove with her, he could not get to Atlanta in time for his appointment. Eating his chicken and biscuits without really seeing or tasting them, he hurried to the telephone office before many were astir. He would phone a telegram to Salonica and have it sent to J. W. Hill. That was simple enough, but what, *what* should he say?

As he stood waiting for the bald-headed liveryman to turn from the mouth-piece, he heard these words: "Yeah, that's it—J. W. Hill, Atlanta. Yeah—J. W. 'Detained by important business. Can't make Atlanta till later. A. G. Prewer.' P-r-e-w-e-r. Yeah, that's it."

The telephone proprietor dropped the receiver and nodded to Cary.

"I want to send a wire to that same man," announced the young fellow brazenly, recovering from the shock of the first telegram. Hastily scribbling a message he passed it over the ink-stained table.

The bald-headed man put on a pair of dirty spectacles and to Cary's consternation slowly read the scrawl aloud. "'Will have to stay unmarried the rest of my life if I meet you per appointment. Please give me more time.' Huh!" The bald-headed man read it through incredulously three times, putting the emphasis on a different word with each effort. "Night letter?" he queried ultimately.

"No," growled Cary. "It's a rush message to go through now." He drew out his wallet and opened it questioningly.

"Cost you about eighty-five cents," mourned the man.

Cary picked up his fifteen cents joyfully. With the sending of the message an albatross-like load dropped from his back. He no longer felt like an ancient mariner, but a very carefree man. Now he must go borrow a tennis racquet, for he was to have a set at ten-thirty with the azalea girl. How wonderful it would be to have her right in front of him where he could watch every movement of her beautiful arm, every toss of her sunlit head, every flash of her eyes. He revelled in the picture as he swung past the little post office with its fly-specked windows and rotting steps, past the sprawly garage and the diminutive meat market. It was wonderful! And then he questioned why she should have asked him to stay. That was preposterous, unfathomable, and he could not figure it out. In his ignorance he did not realize that his apparent indifference had piqued and interested this girl who had been surfeited with men's attentions and that his very human tears after Bill's end had stirred her as no man had ever moved her before.

Cary soon ceased to ask himself why she had been bold enough to keep him. It was enough to be near her while her skillful brain devised occupation for the urbane Prewer. Occasionally, though, she played golf with Prewer and then life was torture.

When the automobile party announced that is had sent for its trunks both Prewer and Cary wired haberdashers for parcel post packages. They watched each other assiduously, even venomously, and to poor Cary it often seemed as if Prewer were the more favored. Sometimes the whole party, Prewer included, motored to some grotto where blue eyed grass waved above a yellow-brown brook, and there they made a fire and browned bacon strips on a long forked stick; sometimes they ascended a rounded mountain top and gazed afar off

at golden clouds and the smoke of distant factories on the horizon; sometimes they walked to foaming falls and stood beneath catching at the rainbow tinted spray; sometimes Cary found himself alone beside the azalea girl and with every moment of companionship she grew more alluring, more desirable.

She never seemed quite so appealing, quite so irresistible as on the twentieth of June, but on that day also a blow fell.

The Grice Lumber Company was responsible for the jarring note in the music of romance, for a note came from them reading: *"Where the deuce are you and what are you doing? Report at headquarters immediately."* As soon as Cary read the cramped writing of his aunt's husband's cousin by the smoky little post-office lamp, he ordered a team at the red barn, sent a note to the azalea girl and, without returning to the hotel to pack, started for Salonica. It was a weird drive in the dark. Fireflies gleamed out of the woods like the eyes of wild animals and the dash-board lantern's flickers on the queer roadside trees made them resemble the animals themselves.

When Cary reached the desolate little station beside the dripping tank he loitered till seven and then had some watery coffee and tough chicken at the dingy hotel beyond the track. After having killed so much time he waited impatiently for the Jacksonville Limited. As he sauntered back and forth past rearing prairie dogs and slouching negroes, Cary reasoned that if he could get an order from J. W. Hill the firm would give him a vacation. A vacation would mean that he could return to Huckleberry Hollow and—a mulatto porter boosted him into a dust-coated vestibule and the train clickety-clicked past corn and cotton, disordered yards and small stands of pine timber. After an eternity it pulled into the big smudgy terminal, and Cary ran up the long dirty steps to the outside world.

The city seemed unbelievably smoky and filthy after the sweet, clean mountains with their fields of daisies and painted cups, their rhododendron ravines and heather-fringed mountain tops. Intolerantly he pushed through the noonday throngs till he reached the attractive Grant Building long occupied by the offices of J. W. Hill. The elevator jerked the eager young man to the sixth floor and in a moment more he was handing his card to a warty-faced office boy.

"Set down," directed the youth, "I'll see."

Cary looked across the worn railing at the pasty-faced clerks and stenographers working there and from his soul he pitied them because life held for them no Huckleberry Hollow with a princess disguised now as a tender woman, now as a willful, impish child. His reverie was interrupted by the boy.

"Can't see you," stated the latter, scratching his knee.

"All right," assented Cary, relapsing into his dreams.

"I said he can't see you," repeated the boy a trifle louder, eying the caller somewhat suspiciously.

"I heard you," remarked Cary. "I'll wait."

The boy moved off uncertainly and there was no sound but the click of typewriters and the cries of teamsters excavating for a new building below the office windows. The noises were nothing to the waiting man. He was pondering as to the present whereabouts of the princess. Was she thinking of him? Was she chattering gaily to Prewer and the brown-haired girl? Or was she lying idly in a red and green hammock watching a nasturtium-hovering humming bird?

A white-coated waiter ultimately passed into the inner sanctum bearing a tray of rolls and milk, whereupon the strife of business ceased. Clerks jammed hats on their heads and strutted out; stenographers powdered their noses and departed. After a time Cary found himself alone. It was hot. An electric fan buzzed over him and the sun glared on his back, but still he sat there as oblivious of his discomforts as a child with a stick of striped candy. He could not detach his mind from the leafy shadiness of Huckleberry Hollow, and the thought of the freshness of his beloved's face banished all weariness from his.

The workers returned. Several callers went into the inner office. The afternoon waned. At five o'clock papers crackled into desk drawers, roll-tops thudded down, and the office force filed out, not without many amused glances at Cary, who remained motionless where he had first seated himself. Several times during the afternoon the office boy had attempted to get rid of his visitor without success. Now he stood staring thoughtfully, concluded to give it up, and whistled off to a baseball bat in some vacant lot.

Fifteen minutes later an angular man with bulging eyes and gray mustache stepped from the inner office. He started past Cary and then paused.

"Want to see me?" he asked.

"Yes," said Cary, rising stiffly. "The Grice Lumber Company wants to sell you an order. I'm Dunreith Cary."

Hill's brows beetled down until his eyes scarcely showed. "WELL," he exploded, "you're a hell of a man!"

"I know it," admitted Cary, "but I've been sitting here all day to get that order. What about it?"

Gradually the heavy brows crawled back to their proper elevation and Hill extended his big square hands. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Cary," he said calmly. "Come in and let's talk it over."

When they reached the plain inner office with its nondescript furnishings, Hill opened his desk and handed Cary a spindle of papers. "Can you meet those specifications?" he demanded.

"We can," affirmed Cary, with quick assurance.

"Very well then," said Hill, seating himself, "there's nothing to discuss but the price and I suppose you don't want more than three times as much as anybody else."

"Quite the contrary," insisted Cary, and then feeling at home he began to talk. When he had landed such an order as he had never dared to consider, he stood up, dazed and uncertain. Again he heard the murmur of the woods and saw the soft cloud shadows on the mountains; again he heard the soft voice of the azalea girl beside him and saw the whiteness of her finely textured hand as she—

"By the way," ruminated Hill, sharply cutting into the reverie as he idly revolved from side to side. "What about the girl in that outrageous telegram of yours? Did she take you?"

"Yes," admitted Cary proudly, adding with simplicity, "I guess nobody ever was so happy before."

Hill smiled. "Nice is she?"

"Nice!" cried Cary, "Well, I guess! She's your daughter, Mr. Hill."

There was a breathless silence and then the great magnate chuckled till he shook. When Cary had decided the shock had upset the old man's mind, Hill left his chair and put his hand affectionately on the forester's broad shoulder. They stood thus for another period before *her* father spoke.

"Good business, son," he whispered huskily, "good business."

WHEN THE RED SNOW FALLS

By CHART PITT

The crew of an ice-bound whaler make camp in the polar wilderness, where the fear of contagion and the weirdness of the winds, the snow and the northern lights drive the men to madness.

"FROZEN in, by God!" ejaculated Captain Swensen as he surveyed the tumbled ice fields about the Aurora. "Frozen in! Nothing to do but go ashore and make a camp and wait for spring."

When darkness closed down upon them the night before, they had been leisurely working their way through the mush ice off Cape Lisburne. Now that desolate headland still showed across the tumbled floe-burgs to the east. They hadn't gained a foot of southing during the night.

"What do you mean, go ashore and camp?" Blake, the second mate, edged nearer the skipper. "Can't we winter in the ship like we always do?"

Swensen's fang-like yellow teeth looked even more wolfish than usual as he thrust his jaw into the second mate's face. "What do you mean with your questions, you fo'castle rat?—always herding with the crew. I said 'go ashore,' that's all you need to know. Get down on the ice to receive the stores and step lively about it."

"Aye, aye sir," said Blake, but there was a look in his black eyes that would have warned a more cautious man than Captain Swensen.

The whaling master's thin lipped smile became a leer as he gazed at Blake. Then he turned on his heel and joined Johnson, the mate, in the wheelhouse.

Swensen was not a large man, but he was a ruler. He weighed not a pound over one hundred and seventy-five, and he was as mild mannered as a cat—a wild cat robbed of her kittens. When he smiled the men grew uneasy, when he leered they hunted cover.

Johnson's was nature's own design for mate of a whale ship. He would have been mate before the voyage was over, no matter in what capacity he had signed on; a man of his size couldn't have been less.

Doctor Ross, the ship's surgeon, had been an unwilling witness to the storm that was brewing between the devil-driving skipper and his second officer. He knew they were heading straight for trouble, and as there were several things he could not understand, he determined to go to Swensen and demand an explanation.

The doctor swung up along the deck. The gray light of the winter morning had not penetrated the interior of the ship, and the lantern that swung from the ceiling of the wheelhouse was still burning. The shadows of Swensen and the mate were cast upon the curtained window.

They were crouching over a table, the captain cool as the ice-fields that shut them away from the world, and the giant Swede staring in open mouthed wonder.

The window was slightly open, and the fitful breeze that puffed down across the floe-burgs kept the curtain in motion. The ever changing shadows upon its red surface seemed endowed with sinister life. Fiends from a lost world, they seemed to the troubled mind of Doctor Ross.

The surgeon tapped at the door before entering. There was a scurrying of papers as he turned the knob and stepped into the room.

"Good morning, Mr. Ross," greeted Swensen as he tossed a roll of charts into the corner. "Heard the news? The ship's froze tight and fast."

"Wasn't much of a surprise was it?" the doctor challenged. "That was what the

second mate was swearing about last night when we were loafing around in the mush ice."

"Mr. Blake will have to be more careful with his language," the captain purred, but his gray eyes were biting with menace. "He's an officer now, and his place isn't with the crew. "He'll find that out before spring."

"The men are in a nasty mood this morning, sir," Ross warned him. "They know it wasn't an accident that the Aurora got caught in the ice. There must be some good reason for staying here. Better let the crew in on it."

"Crew hell," Swensen sneered. "I'll break their heads open, and you can sew them up. That's what I brought you along for."

"I've got to get back to the States," the doctor insisted. "You know I made this trip to earn money enough to finish my studies. I'll go overland to Point Hope."

"No you won't, Mr. Ross." The captain's tobacco-stained fangs showed in a mirthless grin. "Jumping ship in the ice is all the same as mutiny. You know what that means?"

Without a word the doctor walked out of the room. For the first time in his life he had felt the lash of a slave master's whip. A man of peaceful disposition, he had relied always upon the law to safeguard his interest. But up here in the ice Lars Swensen was the law; and Frank Ross was at his mercy, as much as any of the bearded ruffians up forward, who manned the hell ship of the whale fleet. He knew he must look to Blake and the crew for any friendship he might crave; but kept away from them, knowing one word might fan the fire of hate into the flame of open rebellion.

He paced the deck, trying to fight off the new horror that had pounced upon him. As he passed the wheelhouse, a gust of wind came driving down across the ice. For a second the red curtain was whipped back from the window, revealing the interior of the room.

Captain Swensen held a large sketch map of the Cape Lisburne coast in his greasy fingers, and the ham-like hand of the big mate fumbled an uncut ruby, while his greed maddened eyes peered into the bloody heart of the stone.

Doctor Ross stumbled off up the deck. "A treasure hunt," he groaned. "God help us—a treasure hunt in the ice."

With a sickening heart the doctor watched as the men began swinging the provisions over the rail. Like a string of black ants the sailors trailed off across the jumbled floes, dragging a loaded sledge toward the distant headland that thrust its naked nose out into the frozen sea.

Two days later half the landing party returned with the empty sled. To a man, their heads were bound up in bloody bandages. As the doctor sewed up a nasty cut in Blake's scalp, he discovered a particle of granite in the wound.

"Those men of yours must be pretty hard hitters," he ventured.

"Men—hell! It's them rocks. Hope one hits the Old Man on the fore peak—he's so damn fond of Lisburne."

As he labored upon the wound, Ross was combing his brain for a scrap of information which he knew was hidden in some dark corner.

The printed name of that headland upon the map had meant nothing to him, but Lisburne on the bearded lips of this whaler was something altogether different. He had heard the word before, somewhere, and in those same dread tones. Then a ray of light flashed upon him.

"That's the Wind Hole of the World?" he gasped.

"You guessed it right," was all Blake said.

Among the hardy men who followed the whale trail through the grinding floes, this desolate headland had become a byword. It was the one spot they dreaded.

The next morning Blake picked out a new sled crew and started back for the cape. The doctor watched them as they swung away into the gloom, dragging their heavy load behind them.

He was left alone with his suspicions and his fears. What manner of man was this Swensen anyway, to walk into trouble with his eyes open. As it was evident that the crew were not to share in the ac

tual treasure hunt, why not leave them aboard ship? A hunting party composed of the captain and mate would have solved the matter without any friction. Twenty miles across a frozen ocean was not a formidable distance. The Aurora was the only logical base for such an expedition. And then, why hadn't they worked the ship in closer to the shore?

That evening Swensen summoned the doctor to his cabin to consult him concerning the medical supplies going out to the new camp. The captain was busy with a string of figures when Ross came in, and motioned his visitor to a seat. Ross fell to studying a chart that lay on the table. Upon its printed face there were pencil markings, one of which showed the location of the Polarius some twenty odd miles off shore. Between the ship and the cape there were several wavering lines, also in pencil, and a note in Swensen's handwriting. "Open leads along here in mid-winter."

That explained it. No ship would deliberately freeze in, where there were likely to be leads of open water. To be caught in the jaws of one of these, with the whole arctic ice fields driving down against the ship, would grind the best ship into kindling wood. Nor would it have been prudent to depend upon the Aurora for a base under the circumstances.

In the dead gray gloom of a winter twilight, the doctor dragged his exhausted body along behind the skipper, bound for the new home. The last quarter of a mile they were forced to crawl on their hands and knees.

The north wind came driving down across the ice, striking the barrier hills at Cape Beauford, and were forced to the southwest. At Lisburne the hills ran down to the frozen sea, and the winds from fifty miles of that desolate coast were piled upon each other at the very spot where the devil whaler had insisted on building his camp.

Other forms were crawling about them in the gloom. Like overgrown ants they staggered under their burdens and cursed in sullen undertones.

Something brushed against the doctor, and Blake's voice whispered in half strangled gasps.

"The old hellion couldn't have found a worse place to winter, if he had combed the coast from Cape Prince of Wales around to Elsmer Land. I can't handle the men in such a hole. They're going to break loose. When they do, you want to hunt cover."

The winds shrieked like demented devils as they raced around the cliffs and swung off toward the south. The hills were swept as clean as a house floor. Boulders as large as a man's head came whirling down to the ice under a ninety mile gale, like cannon balls.

A thin line of silver began to tremble along the horizon. It was the northern lights, that inhumanly weird thing that dances to the measures of the frost quickened stars, and drives men mad in the awful gloom of the polar wilderness.

Against this eerie background stood Swensen, the wolf-man of the frozen seas. He leaned toward the flailing wind, as though he understood its ghoulish glee. His leering lips curled back from his yellow fangs. It was a smile of hate and defiance.

Then the aurora burst upon them in all its outlaw glory, and the lonely land leaped out of the shadows to mock them.

In that flash of hellish light a native burying ground rose out of the murk, to curse them with its sinister, hideous shapes. The graves were six feet above the earth, instead of six below. The skyline was dotted with dead men, each upon his ghastly perch, looking down upon the camp.

In that naked land even driftwood had been too precious to waste upon burial perches. Whale ribs had been thrust into the northern moss, and lashed together in the shape of a six-legged saw buck. Now the wind-bleached bones gleamed in the gruesome light, like ghastly spiders, each with its black bulk at the top, where a dead man lay beneath the icy stars.

"Smallpox," the devil whaler crooned as he lifted a hand toward them. "No danger of the men trying to run away. If they went down wind from that pest camp they'd die like flies."

Frank Ross knew there was a school of scientists who stoutly disbelieved the theory that pest germs carry on the wind, in fact he himself had been inclined to their teachings; but he also knew there was not a member of the crew who would doubt the captain's word on the subject. Rough-necks the world over have a wholesome respect for the smallpox. They are short on theory and long on reason. Horse sense is the only test tube they know, and they pass up-wind from contagion. And here in that inhuman slave life of which he had become a part, the doctor shared a measure of their horror.

"What if the wind stops—or changes?" he found himself saying.

A mocking laugh out of the swirling, icy hell was his only answer.

Once more the doctor fought his way toward the camp. The human ants cursed and struggled about him. Two forms reeled together in the gale. A knife gleamed in the starlight, and only one shape crawled away across the snow.

Blake certainly knew what he was talking about. The crew was getting beyond control. The doctor made his way to where the huddled form lay among the drifts, but the sailor had need for nothing now, except to have his mutilated body hidden from sight; and the flying snow already was fulfilling that last duty to the dead.

Like a beaten animal Frank Ross crawled away into the night, leaving the gloating winds to keep their watch over the ghastly memento of human madness. He knew they would cover and uncover their gruesome plaything a thousand times before the coming of the spring.

Stumbling at every step the doctor made his way in the direction taken by the human ants, and presently two mound-like turf-huts rose up out of the night gloom before him. At the door of the smaller of the two make-shift structures he came upon Swensen. The devil whaler's face was turned toward the south. Like an angel from the inferno, he gazed upon that silent city of pest corpses.

"Bet you them fellows over on the whalebones are glad we came," he chuckled. "Must have been pretty lonely for them after the Flat Faces left."

Frank Ross crept into the miserable shelter, glad to escape the buffeting gale. He found the Chinese cabin boy cooking supper over an oil stove. The heat of the room made him drowsy. He crawled into his blankets and fell asleep with the sullen drumming of Lisburne's winds in his ears.

In the gray of the laggard morning the burly mate shook him from his bed, as a terrier would handle a rat.

"You're wanted over in the fo'castle hut Mr. Ross. Better take your bandages with you." He fairly dragged the sleepy doctor along in his wake.

Johnson threw back a corner of the canvas door. The hot air belched out, and turned to a silver cloud about them. The stench of human blood was mingled with the reek of poor ventilation.

With a shudder Frank Ross stepped inside. Eyes blazed at him from the darkness, like giant bats clinging to the sides of a cave. They glittered with the blue-green fire of madness. They were not men he had been called to minister to, but wild beasts that had fought with tooth and nail during the long night. They whined like wounded animals when he dressed their sores.

Doctor Ross staggered back to the officer's quarters, his hands dripping with blood. He found Swensen standing at the door of the hut, looking over toward the native burying ground.

"You've got to get the men out of here, Captain." He forced himself to speak respectfully to the monster whom he had come to loathe and fear. "If they spend another night in this hell-hole, they'll be crazier than wolves before morning."

"There is room for some of them over on the whalebones." The words seemed to ooze out of the malignant form of the devil whaler. Doctor Ross was certain that his lips never moved; and his eagle eyes still searched among the shadows that hovered above the corpse camp on the hill.

Despairing of doing anything with the heartless whaler, Frank Ross crawled into the hut. In the close, reeking atmosphere

he tried to forget the vampire land that gripped them in its greedy claws. But even the turf walls of the building could not shut out the bellow of the gale. In that din, words were useless unless shouted at the top of the voice; so they resorted to sign language to make their wants known.

The gray, lifeless day faded out over the frozen sea. Along the dim sky-line the floe-bergs were hunched up like monsters from some hideous underworld. Still Lisburne's hellish winds flailed the naked headland, and tightened the red fetters of madness about the desolate camp. The hours slipped by uncounted. The unhappy castaways burrowed deeper and deeper among the blankets, in the vain hope of shutting out the brain-rending clamor of the gale. But the devil whaler sat hunched above the oil stove, a mirthless smile upon his twisted lips, and his best ear turned toward the north, as if listening for some new horror to come stalking down across the ice-fields.

The doctor fell asleep at last. When he awoke the winds had ended in a sobbing moan as the last gusts trailed off across the tundra toward the south. The silence that followed was a thousand times more trying than the storm had been. The doctor could hear the heart beats of his companions, fluttering in the poison blackness about him. He knew that each man was holding his breath, afraid of its sound in that grave-like calm that lived in the empty spaces left tenantless by Lisburne's hellish winds.

Frank Ross hungered for a breath of the pure, frosty night air. He crawled from his blankets, and crept toward the door. Even his moccasined feet upon the soft tundra-turf of the floor sounded like the tramping of a mastodon in that uncanny stillness.

Like the dead waves of a ghost sea the snow drifts ran out upon every side and faded in the murk. The blue stars danced to a drunken tune; even the blood in the doctor's veins seemed to quicken its paces to that mirthless ragtime.

He could hear the sound of moving bodies over in the fo'castle hut; and knew they were suffering the tortures of the damned. But something in that ghostly night forbade that he should go to them; a mandate unspoken, yet so awful and vast that it froze the soul with its omnipotence.

There was something weirdly pathetic in the utter lack of life out there in the frosty reaches of the polar wilderness. Like the dumb face of a mourner, more awful because of its mute grief, the lonely land seemed to shiver in silence under the blight of its abysmal woe.

As Frank turned away from the dead, eerie world, his tortured eyes caught a faint smudge of cloud along the northern skyline.

"O God, give us the winds again," the man's naked soul whispered to his agonized brain—and it was a prayer.

Shivering with something more terrible than the cold, he groped his way into the hut. The hot stench of the inside gripped his breath like a filthy, choking hand. He stumbled to his blankets and lay uncovered, waiting for the sound of the scout winds that would ride in the teeth of the storm.

But the hours dragged, and no sound came to warn them of the new horror which Lisburne was preparing for them under cover of the night.

"God, won't it ever blow?" Blake's whispered whine seemed to shake the turf walls of the hut, leaving the reeking void more oppressive than ever before.

But the devil whaler kept his thoughts to himself. Only the Almighty knew what was crawling in his malignant brain.

As in everything else, the mate copied the mood of his superior officer.

Somewhere in the trackless maze of those black hours Frank Ross fell asleep. He was awake again before the dawn—listening, listening for something it seemed never would come.

Meaningless words kept running through his mind, and he had no power to stop them. Sometimes it would be a line from a song he secretly despised, yet the words would repeat and repeat. In desperation he counted his pulse beats, only to find himself once more listening for the sound of the coming storm. Then the banished words would come trooping back

to drag their loathsome syllables across his aching brain.

Then with a start of fear he remembered. It was the wind that had protected them from the germs of pestilence that forever hovered over those stark forms upon the hill, and the wind had left them to their fate.

But each new horror was only a thing of the moment, in that museum of terror.

At last Frank Ross found a measure of relief in the ticking of his watch, buried deep within his clothing. Like the tinkling of a far bell it called and called. Presently the timepiece, too, seemed to be following the mad measures of that soulless land of which they had become a part.

Then a cry of horror sprang full-throated out of the empty world, and went fluttering away into the homeless wilderness of ice. The four men leaped for the door. Already the other hut was belching a fighting, cursing mob of maniacs.

The morning light was growing brighter above the wind-scarred cliffs, and such a morning of madness even the terrible Lisburne never had seen before. As far as the eye could pierce the gloom, a blood-red world lay stretched before them. It had snowed in the night, the gruesome, crimson snow of the high north.

"It's the bloody snow of death," a hairy whaler wailed like a hungry wolf-dog. "It's the last voyage of the Aurora."

"You lie." The cold, biting voice of Swensen cracked like the lash of a whip.

Its tones would have cowed the hardest man in the crew the day before. Now it seemed only a part of that heartless land, against which one must fight to live. "It's back into the hills you're going this morning—away back and make a camp, and wait while Mr. Johnson and I go hunting for *fresh meat.*"

"It means death. I saw it once before up in the ice," the pessimistic old whiner continued doggedly. "It came in the night, and the scurvy hit us before the day was over. Then the madness blew out of the north, and I was the only one that came down over the pack."

The doctor knew that a hundred years before, science had solved the riddle of the red snow—that its color had nothing to do with impending disaster, but was caused by the presence of chemicals gathered from a low order of sea plants. Yet he realized that it was useless to waste scientific words upon that rabble of soul-stunted men who had gone mad under the lash of the terrible Lisburne.

"Point Hope—Point Hope," the crew took up the challenging cry.

The devil whaler and his giant mate bore down upon them, lashing the huddled knot of men with their vile curses, before they got within reach of blows.

The doctor expected to see them scatter for cover. But suddenly the world was rife with the song of whetted steel, rasping in the eerie dawn. One moment the mob split in the middle before the furious onslaught. The black blotch opened like the mouth of some monster to receive the two officers, then the jaws closed upon them.

Frank Ross leaped forward, but Blake's hands caught him like a pair of iron claws, and held him helpless while the wrath of mad men was vented upon their tormentors.

For a moment those two devil drivers from the hell ship gave blow for blow. A pistol flashed spitefully in the body of the mob. Then the weapon vomited its leaden wrath in the air, as it was wrenched from Swensen's hand. A moment later the tangled knot of seamen surged back, leaving two huddled forms upon the snow. Then once more Lisburne's winds swept down upon them, in broken gusts around the headland, and began to drift the red snows over Captain Swensen and his bucko mate.

"Now I can beat it through to Point Hope." The doctor shouted his satisfaction into Blake's ear.

"Like hell you can," the officer snarled. "It's back to the Aurora for the whole bunch of us." His voice shivered and broke.

For a new note had risen its steady measures, to the full vacant spaces in the gusty wind. It was the thudding, grinding craunch of ice floes fretting in the arctic

tides—the open leads of which the chart had warned.

A rough hand dragged the doctor into the close gloom of the hut, and he faced Blake across the oil stove.

"What you going to do about it?" the officer challenged. "Going to stick by the crew and keep your mouth shut—or—you know?"

"You're crazy," the doctor blurted, "the whole bunch of you, but I'll stick by the crew. That wasn't any dream about the scurvy either. One fellow has a touch of it now. It's exercise and green stuff they need, and you can't get them around Lisburne or on the ship. That's a smallpox camp up there on the hill, and we've got to get out of here. Don't tell the crew about it, just take them down to Hope."

"The crew knows. Swenson told them yesterday," Blake snarled. "But I ain't going to run this bunch down to Hope. They'd blat the whole business about the killing, just crazy enough to shoot their faces off. A few months aboard ship, and they'll have a story fixed up so they'll believe themselves."

"I can't make another trip on the Aurora —" Ross began.

"That's all right, Doctor, you needn't be afraid of us. You do what's right by us, and we'll let you go south in the spring."

"I'll do what's square," the doctor promised.

"Sure you will. We won't give you a chance to be crooked." Blake leered back at him; and Frank Ross knew that he was a prisoner in a camp of mad men. They might spare him till the winter was over, especially if there was a lot of sickness. That was the idea, a lot of sickness. The words kept drumming in his ears. He could not banish the thought.

The temptation was still crawling in the doctor's brain, when he sorted his drugs an hour later. His fingers touched a box containing arsenic, and he trembled as though the hand clutched him.

That was the way, the only way. It was his life or theirs.

Frank Ross struggled in the grip of that primeval passion which was fastening its tentacles in his soul. In the fetid air of the gloomy hut he fought to maintain his honor, realizing that he was nearing the point of madness to harbor such thoughts.

Not for a moment was he left alone. Either Blake or a sailor stood guard beside the door. Plainly he saw that the box of poison contained his only chance of escape. The fear loomed greater ahead, and the battle waxed hotter and hotter with his soul, as the gray day faded out across the floe-burgs, and he and the officer sat huddled over the oil stove.

At last he made his decision. He took the box out of his pocket and offered it to the whaler.

"Here's something you'd better take care of," he suggested.

"What is it?"

"It's the powder you saw me using on those bird skins I mounted last summer. Remember?"

"To hell with you and your bird skins," Blake snarled. "You fellows make me tired, chasing around after arctic gulls."

"They call the stuff arsenic," Ross continued. "Guess there's enough poison in that box to preserve the whole crew of the Aurora."

For a moment a flush surged over Blake's hairy face. Then it faded, and left him grayer than ever. His eyes bulged under his heavy lashes. He clutched the box in his hand.

"My God," he wailed. "I never thought of anything like that. You had that stuff all the time, had the upper hand of us, and didn't dare to use it. Now you've given it up without a fight, given up your last chance. My God what am I saying?"

"Never mind, Blake," the doctor spoke. "I knew you were lying all the time. But I want my chance, a fighting chance you know."

"God, man, I can't stand to see you die, after laying down that winning hand. You'd haunt me as long as I lived. It would be like killing a woman or a priest."

"You'll feel different about it when the sun somes back. Just remember when the time comes, that you owe me my chance—an even break."

"I know I do, that's the hell of it," the

officer groaned. "I can't bear to see you die after what you done to-day. I don't want to know about it if you *do* die, don't want to know where your bones are. If I only dared to let you go. I've got to think of some way."

After that Doctor Ross lived under a suspended death-sentence. There was one chance left. Blake didn't want to see him die, had a superstitious horror of knowing anything about it. But the officer's eyes grew more shifting as the days went by, and the floes grumbled in the open leads off shore, and Lisburne cringed beneath the lashing gales.

Then one evening the wind slackened. It was not a maddening void such as had cursed them that night of the red snow, but a strip of typical fair weather in the arctic.

The gray, ghostly thing that had served for daylight had faded over the ice fields. A thin, fluttering wind was whining among the tumbled floe-bergs when Blake came to relieve the sailor who had been standing above the doctor.

"You've got to escape to-night," the second mate whispered cautiously as soon as the other man had left the hut. "I've fixed you up some dried beef to take along, something you can carry in your pocket. You ought to make it to Hope in two days. When you get there, tell them you was hunting and got lost."

The hour had come at last when Frank Ross was to have his chance. He had hoped for some turn in the fortune-wheel that would enable him to die fighting. That was the best he could expect. This new fiber in the soul of the whaler was almost too good to be true, but there was the bag of dried meat waiting in the hand of the bearded Samaritan of the snows.

Frank Ross clutched the bag of beef and stowed it in his spacious mackinaw pocket. Then he grasped the hairy paw of the whaler in a tense half-moment of farewell.

Blake gripped the doctor's fingers like a steel trap, but he turned his head away. A strange chill ran over the man who was about to escape from the dreaded Lisburne. It couldn't be emotion that suddenly had found the heart of the hardened whaler. It might be superstition, a dread of looking into the eyes of a man who was about to walk the streets of that dreaded city of pest corpses up on the hill. Without turning his head, the officer passed over an automatic and two boxes of cartridges. Then he shoved him out into the night.

Like a shadow the doctor slipped away among the drifts toward the burying ground. The wind packed snow yielded but slightly beneath his weight. At the top of the hill he turned for one backward glance at the terrible Lisburne, where he had lived in the shadow of death.

Suddenly the two turf huts stood out in strange prominence, like a distant tree in the path of the moon. There was a cry from the camp side, and a rabble of fur-clad figures swarmed out of the fo'castle hovel. Frank Ross turned and ran. Then he understood.

Through some freak of nature the aurora had flared up at that moment to expose him; not in the north where it belonged, but a great blotch of throbbing light across the southern sky.

As the doctor plunged away into the face of the ghastly, shivering reflections, the whalers surged up the hill after him. The burial perches rose up out of the gloom ahead. Like ghostly monsters they stood against the aurora, watching that race of death.

Frank Ross forced his muscles to the breaking point, and beyond. Then with a shiver he felt the strength leaving him. He staggered and fell among the drifts, as the cursing mob swept up out of the night.

One chance remained to the fugitive; and Frank Ross took it.

For the moment the mob was hidden in a dip of the hill. With the last ounce of strength the doctor leaped into the air, caught hold of a burial perch and drew himself up beside the frozen mass of putrid flesh that once had been a man. The moose-hide bag of beef slipped from his pocket and thudded to the snow.

With every fiber of his body revolting at the action, Frank Ross forced himself to embrace the dead Flat Face who had

gone out in the smallpox scourge. Shivering with horror he heard the pursuit scatter and die out in the distance. The aurora, satisfied with its treachery, fluttered and faded on the horizon. The trembling fugitive shook himself free from his loathsome bedfellow, tumbled to the ground, fumbled in the darkness to recover his bag of meat, and struck off across the tundra.

For an hour he plodded toward the south. He began to grow weak, and hunger burned at his stomach. He opened the bag of food. His teeth grated upon the hard lump he tried to chew. He cursed under his breath as he struck a match. Had Blake tricked him with a bag of bones?'

The sputtering light of the sulphur glowed upon the dull red faces of half-polished rubies. It was not the bag Blake had given him.

For a moment the doctor stood dazed, peering at the fortune that had come into his possession in such a strange manner. Then his brain cleared. He had picked it up by mistake under the burial perch. He knew that those gems had been placed there by some friend of the dead Flat Face, as a white man might scatter flowers upon a grave. They had come from the ruby-field back somewhere in the hills, that had tempted Swensen to spend the winter in Lisburne's crazy hell.

With the rubies in his pocket, Frank Ross hurried back for the meat. He located the burial perch just as the moon was creeping up over the ghostly snow fields; he drew back in a shiver of fear.

His hand had touched a dead fox, lying beside the rifled bag. It was poisoned meat Blake had given him for his journey. The whaler hadn't taken any chances on knowing the spot where the bones of his victim lay.

Once more the doctor fled toward the south. Filling his stomach with bitter lichens from the rocks he pressed forward. Two days later he dragged his exhausted body into Point Hope.

After he had eaten he put his hand into his pocket for his pipe. His fingers touched the bag of rubies.

"Never thought I'd come down to robbing grave yards," he whispered under his breath, "but I'm not going back with them. Guess I earned 'em—and then some."

When the Aurora reached Seattle that fall, she found a police launch waiting for her.

Frank Ross had demanded a fighting chance, and Blake had sent him out into the wilderness with a bag of poisoned food. Treachery had killed the gratitude which was growing into lusty proportions in the doctor's heart as he turned his back on the little camp in the shadow of Lisburne's hell, a gratitude that was beginning to loom larger than his duty to the law.

THE GREAT HORN HAYFORK

By CHARLIE ALEXANDER

Mully McDade has a trying day. Everything goes dead wrong, and Mully, being human, does more swearing than smiling, although eventually a smile breaks through the clouds.

KYRIOLOGICAL expletives composed Mully McDade's remarks, extending throughout several sweaty minutes, when a tug broke and he had to patch it with baling wire. In words more plain than beautiful he told the outfit, Richardson's Gap and the whole square, flat world about him, not so much what he thought of them as what his rebellious heart thought of Fate in general.

Particularly was he ired by the swath of misfortune that he had this day reaped. The accident to his tug was representative of a day chock-a-block with accidents, ranging from trivial to near-serious.

The cheat was over-ripe and stiff; it did not handle readily. The pitchers were over-tired and dour; they did not pitch properly. The nags were worn and jerky. The hayfield had been plowed wet and was so cloddy that even Mully McDade, born on a hayrack while it, with locked wheels, descended a Cascade Mountains road, scarce could ride right-side up as a driver should.

Every forkful the pitchers threw into his face loosed a lung-tickling cloud of dust as it settled on the load, center of which was McDade. The fodder, being brittle, was slippery. Hither and yon the load slid as the rack negotiated the clod-patch; yon and hither went Mully McDade atop of it until, when a large bunch of cheat hay, which he happened to be surmounting, dived back to Mother Earth, Mully dived with it.

And the clod that had precipitated the diving match had jerked his brand-new tug into three pieces, while the other old, rotten ones, that could scarce bear their own weight, were unbroken.

Such a day in itself would loosen any Irish rancher's larynx. But there had been more; oh, much more.

Being a bach, Mully McDade breakfasted at Henkle's. He was helping, with a crew that took the neighborhood by turn, to get in Henkle's hay.

Arch Hammer, engaged to a daughter of Old Man Henkle, was there. He was a rollicking, ruthless josher and nowhere was in better element than in the kitchen of a farm-gathering, cutting up with the girls who would cut up and teasing those who would not.

Marie Henkle, whose engagement to Mully McDade was so fresh and wonderful that it was as yet unannounced, was one of those who would never cut up with Arch Hammer. She was clever, with Western cleverness, and had brought him up standing upon many an occasion.

On this morning Arch, flushed with successes all along the line, had seized Marie as she laid table, and planted a great, smacking kiss full upon her lips.

He was prepared for quite a scene on Marie's part, and sure of a great laugh from the throng. But Marie simply went on her way without the slightest demonstration or even an additional tinge to the turn of her cheek. And the hands, gathering for breakfast, being men, did not cheer. They said to each other approvingly that Marie had again cut him at the pockets.

Mully McDade, coming in, heard just the smack and the silence.

During breakfast he roiled internally. She came out to him at the porch pump afterwards. She said she would explain.

But that was the wrong word for the occasion.

"Nothing to explain," said he. "Since he got away with it so easy, I s'pose he'll be kissing you every time he comes and goes."

"Mully—" she interposed.

"And the rest of the bunch—they'll take their tip from him. Oh, it'll be great. They'll all kiss you wherever they see you—every time they go by, on the streets in town—in church, maybe. Nothing to explain, that I can see."

Arch mosied by, en route to his team.

"Hello, sis," shouted he. "Matter? Won't Mack kiss you goodbye?"

"No, Mack don't kiss her goodbye," said McDade evenly.

She had her mother's temper, who once in her maidenhood had badly bitten the ear of a rustic masher.

"Of course not," she shot. "Mack'll *never* kiss me goodbye—or hello, either."

And the three were gone their divers ways.

Well, he would not coax her. McDade hopped his wagon hub, missed it and nearly bit the dust. He had not meant that he was through. She should have known that. Hers were the first lips he had ever touched, and they were new, very new. Sweet he had found them. That they were violated so soon seemed more than he could bear to think upon.

To himself he grumbled. "She needn't fly off the handle. Didn't get excited when Arch kissed her. But me, when I said something—well, I don't go back and beg, not by a long shot."

And as he made the decision, which he reiterated a thousand times during the day, his fork slid off the rack and he must needs go back a quarter of a mile, when he discovered the loss, to pick it up.

Now, all the other wagons gone on to his own place he started for Henkle's barn with the last load of Henkle's hay crop.

He could have sworn, as he drew up beneath the high swinging fork, that he heard a person moving inside the barn.

The man who operated the fork had gone. Mully handled his loads alone. His horses were perfectly trained, as are the pets of all bachelors. He hitched them to the rope that pulled the fork up and along the track into the barn, and, while handling the fork himself, simply called to them his orders. When they had drawn the load in, and he had dumped it with the trip-rope, they turned and came back without tangling the tackle.

The second load up something went wrong with the fork. It stuck just inside the big window high up under the gable, through which the track ran and thence straight along the ridge to the far end of the mow.

Mully hauled out a rheumatic, twisty ladder. At this end of the barn there extended across it a row of stalls, boarded over the top to receive hay. His ladder not reaching from the main floor, the rancher heaved it up on top of the stalls, clambered after, and, upending it, mounted.

The fork with its heavy load of hay was inside the barn along the track a little way, just so far that Mully could not reach the pulley upon which it ran, from his ladder. He could, though, reach the fork itself. He seized it and swung himself over on the load of hay, reached up to the pulley, which had simply jumped the track, and sought to force it back again.

His work for several moments was unavailing. Then he discovered that this was due to his own weight added to that of the fork-load of hay, which made it impossible for him to budge the pulley. So with one hand he hung from the track itself, his feet flying wildly from the hay, while with the other he pried at the pulley.

In a few seconds he found the combination, and the mechanism jumped back into place. But the little wheel had caught his thumb squarely underneath it. The digit was slowly crushing between the iron pulley and the iron track.

His other arm was exhausted, and he caught the fork with his legs and let himself down upon the hay to rest. But instantly his own full weight came upon his thumb. Again he swung from the track with one hand. And then he shut his teeth and dragged the trapped thumb free.

With his feet around the fork, sitting upon the little bunch of fodder not larger than a fat washtub, Mully McDade's latest

ill luck on this unlucky day left him powerless even to swear.

He looked to his ladder and decided to get busy, when again he heard someone below him. He caught a glimpse of flashing white that might have been an apron flitting out the door.

His team, too, saw it. For the first time in their lives, they ran away. They ran violently, and Mully and his hayfork sailed through air across the loft until they came to the farther end of the barn and the track's end. The rope snapped, and the horses, feeling the slack, turned from habit and came jogging back as though they had merely decided to waste no more time upon that fork but to dump it and be done of it.

The rebound carried McDade just far enough from the end wall so that he could not reach it. The hay had all been dumped near the middle of the barn. Below was nothing but hard, planked floor, a full fifty feet down.

"Well," pronounced Mr. McDade aloud, his diction now remarkably sweet, "this is the teetotally binghorndest bearcat I ever fell into. First the fork goes on the hummer; then it steps on my big finger; the plugs break all known rules of equine etiquette and give me a free and unannounced slide-for-life. Then, I wham into the wall and like to knock down Henkle's barn."

The sight and pain of his mashed member turned him ill.

"And here me—me, who never before was where I couldn't kick and cuss my way out—is marooned on this desert haycock, a-hanging' on for dear life and gettin' more on the shelf every minute with that thumb. And the shelf, as it happens," he concluded in wonderful good-nature now that he was in real danger, "is just exactly fifty feet straight-up from eternity.

"Near-r-r-er, my God, to Thee," he wavered, uncertain of the lilt. "But I'd just as leave get a little nearer the lower regions instead," mused Mully, considering the floor again. It suggested nothing so much as that hardness which makes for instant death should one fall half a hundred feet upon it.

"By the Great Horn Hay—" he began again.

"Oh, Mully," called Marie Henkle, "can't you get down?"

"Surest thing you know," he chirruped joyfully. Her anxiety enthused him.

"Why—"

"I *have* been pretty blue," said he, "but still ain't just ready to die, especially right before your sweet young face. If you want me to come down, kindly turn your back a minute, will you please?"

"Oh, Mully!" He clenched his good hand in very delight of it.

"Can't I get the ladder?"

"Yes," said Mully. "That ladder is slightly better than thin air when it comes to descending. I remember seeing it hanging on two pegs under the eaves of Noah's Ark. He let it down once to rescue a pair of poor colored Noobians. And when we landed we all went down it backwards to the mud."

By now Marie had dragged it to the spot, as only a buxom Oregon lass could, and upreared it. But there was no stall-platform at this end, and the ladder fell short a dozen feet.

"Thought my luck had turned, a minute ago," said the Celt.

Six feet from the top of the barn, one of the twelve-inch boards in the end thereof was sawed off. Left between it and the gable was a six-by-one foot slit-like window, uncalled for in the specifications. This hole was just opposite the fork. Marie, mounted on the ladder, pushed the fork to the barn's end with a pole. There she braced it while Mully wedged himself into the space. From his feet it was just a man's height to the ladder's top. Gingerly he let down. But with his touchy thumb he could not make it.

Marie was out and away. In but a few moments she threw open the doors and drove in behind McDade's team, perched high on McDade's load of hay. She backed the load up to the wall below him.

He beamed. Carefully he lowered. He must leap to the center of the load. He twisted around in his slit until his back was wedged in it and he faced forward for the leap.

And then, losing its bracing upon a knot below, his heel slipped prematurely, and Mully McDade slid straight down. The back of his buttoned jumper caught on the board-end beneath, which was the bottom of his window, and he hung there, unable to go up or down; kicking, snorting.

"Well, anyway," he said to her, "this isn't the first time an Irishman has hung."

Slowly his jumper was tearing. When it had torn enough he would fall. But falling was not jumping; and Mully McDade knew that to save himself he must jump.

The wagon was not flush against the wall. It appeared to be, because the hay overlapped the hayrack's edge. But this very overlap prevented the solid load from joining with the barn wall. And this overhang was thin and weak.

The Irishman drew a long breath. It ripped, as he knew it would rip, the remaining cloth to the collar. He fell straight at the thin overhang hay and not at the load proper.

A vision of the projecting coupling pole behind the hayrack flashed upon him. It would double him up nicely.

The ladder still stood between barn and hayrack. It was nearly flat against the wall, as Marie had tried to make it reach him. McDade fell but a brief instant; then his feet struck a ladder rung forcibly, hurtling him powerfully forward and into the hay at her feet.

Ere he knew, she had bound and tied his thumb with a white strip that was suspiciously worked and scalloped upon its edges.

"Marie," he said. "What was you doing in this barn?"

"Why, I was feeling kind of punk," said she, looking suddenly away. "So I was just telling the—the horses about it."

"Say, didn't I need you today, though? By the Great Horn Hayfork, I *was* in a hole."

He searched her eyes for what he might read there.

"That's the way I need you all the time —to-morrow, and always. Say, I believe in doing things—"

"Do you?" She looked up at him now, hesitant, smiling.

And then he forgot that Arch Hammer that very day had violated those new-sweet lips.

THE SPIRIT WAS WILLING

By JOHN BAER

An editor and a chief of police post a bet on the outcome of an experiment in criminology.

JOHN WILLOUGHBY, managing editor of the Post, sat in his office with his feet on his desk and his eyes on his feet. In his lap lay a closed volume, *L'uomo Delinquente,* a noted work on criminology by the learned Italian, Doctor Lombroso. A moment before Police Captain Timothy Jones had entered and had helped himself to five of Willoughby's cigars. He stood beside Willoughby now, smoking one of them, and grinning.

"Well," asked the captain, "have you changed your mind any about the value of Doctor Lombroso's ideas?"

"I have not," was Willoughby's reply. "I still insist that a man can not be born a criminal any more than he can be born a grocer."

"When we argued the point yesterday," reminded Jones, "you were a bit more emphatic in your contentions. You brought your fist down upon the table and said you could take any man who had been classified by the police as an incorrigible and habitual criminal, and within the space of one year reform him."

"I said more than that," said Willoughby. "I said I had one thousand dollars to bet on it. Any time you care to accept."

"That's what I'm here for now, Willoughby. What are we to understand by the term 'reformed?'"

"I mean that within one year the man will have a changed—have a different mind. I mean his mind will no longer be 'criminal.' He will look, speak and act like the average honest citizen. You are to be the sole judge. Unless *you* can see the change, I lose the bet. Is that fair?"

"Good," said Jones. "Will you let me pick out the man?"

"Certainly."

Captain Jones made as if to go. "Very well," he said, "I'll try to find you a specimen as soon as possible." Then he asked, carelessly, "Oh, by the way, Willoughby, what time is it?"

Willoughby put his hand into his vest pocket to take out his watch. An expression of surprise came over his face. He put his hand into his other vest pocket.

"Lose your watch?" said Jones.

"Must have. And yet, I don't see how that could be possible."

"Well, don't worry, John," consoled the captain. "I'll find it for you." He opened the door, and called out into the adjoining room, "Come in here a moment, will you, Flannigan?"

Two men stepped into the managing editor's office. One of them was Flannigan, a detective. The other was a seedy-looking individual, whom Jones addressed as follows: "Mike, meet Mr. Willoughby. He's the gentleman whose watch you nipped this noon in the subway. Flannigan, look at Mr. Willoughby's watch and tell me what time it is."

The detective took a watch out of his pocket and replied, "It's three-thirty-three, sir."

Captain Jones took the watch from Flannigan and handled it to its astonished owner. "At exactly three-thirty-three, February twenty-third, one year from now, John, your job will have to be completed." He pointed at Mike. "There's your man. His name is Michael Fogarty, alias Slippery Mike. Good luck, Willoughby." He helped himself to five more cigars and thrust them into the pocket of the very puzzled

detective. "Let's go now, Flannigan, and just see that you keep your mouth shut about this matter, will you?" He took Flannigan by the arm and led him out through the door. "So long, John," he grinned, and was gone.

The appearance of Michael Fogarty was certainly against him. He had all the characteristics of the criminal type which Doctor Lombroso prided himself on having discovered. The receding forehead was there, and the square, massive jaw and prognathous chin. His ears were large and projecting, his nose rectilinear, long, and his eyes fixed and glassy.

Willoughby admitted to himself that earning that one thousand dollars was going to be no easy job. He decided, however, to waste no time in getting started.

"Mike," he asked, kindly, "when did you have your last meal?"

"Yesterday morning," replied Mike, keeping his eyes on the floor.

Willoughby took a bill out of his pocket and laid it upon the desk. "Take that and go out and eat," he said. "Eat till your appetite is satisfied, and get back here before five o'clock."

The criminal began to shift about uneasily. He had an idea he was being made the victim of a practical joke. However, he had taken an instinctive liking to Willoughby, and the latter's extremely friendly manner reassured him somewhat. He took the bill and stammered, "Thank you, mister. And if I promise to be back by five, will you tell me now, what you are going to do with me?"

Willoughby replied, gravely, "I'm going to try to change your mind!"

Fogarty's forehead wrinkled. He scratched himself behind the right ear. Then, as though he understood clearly what Willoughby meant, he grinned, "Yes, sir—yes, sir," and walked out.

The following Monday morning at nine o'clock, Mr. Michael Fogarty, wearing a decent suit of clothes, and sporting a collar and tie, commenced his duties as handy man about the office of the Post. At nine-thirty, Miss Mabelle Sweet, who wrote advice to the lovelorn, and covered society weddings, reported that her gold bracelet had disappeared. Fogarty was immediately summoned to Willoughby's office.

"Mike," said Willoughby, without looking up, "Miss Sweet has lost her bracelet. Help her find it."

Fogarty merely replied, "Yes, sir," and walked out of the room. In the outer office he put on his hat and coat, and then walked calmly out of the building. Willoughby saw him go. He had to grip the sides of his chair to keep himself from jumping up; he had to go deep down into his system and dig up the last ounce of faith to keep himself from crying out.

Fifteen minutes later, Fogarty came back. "Boss," he said, politely, "I just give her back her bracelet."

"Oh," replied Willoughby. "And may I ask where it was?"

"It was in the right hand coat-pocket of Freddie Ricardo."

"And—and how did you know that?"

"I didn't know it. You see, boss, Freddie came into this place about half-past nine to ask the sporting editor for a pass to the races at Jamaica. Freddie used to be a bookie but since the law against betting, he's down on his luck. Well, on his way out, he passed Miss Sweet's desk. A minute before, I heard the lady say that she was going into the wash room and scrub some of the typewriter ribbon ink off her hands. So when you told me her bracelet was missing, I figured maybe she laid it on her desk, and maybe from there it got into Freddie's pocket."

"And how did you make sure of it?"

"I searched him!"

"You—searched him? Where?"

"In the corner saloon."

"You mean to tell me that Ricardo submitted to search in public?"

"Oh, he didn't know nothing about it," said Fogarty, "I went through his pockets while he was arguing with the bar tender!"

"You—you went through his pockets!" exploded the managing editor. "You went through—you *picked* his pockets?"

"Sure!" answered Fogarty. "How else could I tell what Freddie had in his pockets but by picking them?"

The words were spoken with such utter simplicity and straightforwardness that

Willoughby couldn't find the heart to take the man to task. He merely thanked him and sent him about his work again.

During the months which followed, Fogarty lived up to the highest expectations of his "boss." He was a sober, conscientious worker. He was promoted first to the copy boy's job, and then he became a reporter. By the end of November the kindness, faith and patience of Willoughby had wrought a tremendous change upon the character of the former 'habitual criminal.' Fogarty looked, spoke and acted very much in the same manner as the average honest citizen looks, speaks and acts.

Then one day in the early part of December, while he was walking along Park Row, a man tapped him on the shoulder, and saluted him with, "Hello, Slippery Mike. How's the pick-pocket business getting along?" It was the voice of Gresser, a detective, who hated Fogarty above all other men.

"You lay off me," retorted Fogarty, hotly. "And don't call me 'Slippery Mike.' I'm Mr. Fogarty of the Post."

"So you've changed your trade, eh? Well, take my advice, and stick to newspaper work. It's easier than picking pockets. And besides, you always was a rotten dip. I never could see how a great big clumsy lummox like you could work a game which requires finesse."

A hard expression came about Fogarty's mouth. His eyes half closed, his cheeks grew red. Before he could answer, Gresser had turned from him and mingled with the crowd again. Fogarty lit a cigarette, stood still and stared into space for a moment, and then followed Gresser.

The next morning, Detective Gresser received a letter which read as follows: "Dear Sir: Enclosed find one pawn ticket with which you can get back your watch, chain, tie pin and revolver which I took away from you yesterday right after you told me I was a rotten pick-pocket. If you ever insult me like that again, I'll steal your shoes, stockings, shirt and hat while you're walking on Broadway. Yours truly, Michael Fogarty."

The same day on which Gresser received that letter, Willoughby had a premonition that something was in the air. He had a "feeling" that something was wrong with Fogarty. Fogarty was "different" that day, and yet, to all appearances he was performing his duties in the same manner in which he had always performed them. Willoughby watched his man closely, and at length he discovered the difference. It was in Fogarty's eyes. They were glassy and restless. They were the eyes of the Slippery Mike who had been introduced into the office of the Post that February.

When Michael had left for his lunch that day, Willoughby summoned Miller, Brady and Hopkins, the three best cubs in the business, into the office, and instructed them, "Boys, get after Fogarty and stick to him till he comes back to this office. Don't interfere in any of his actions. I want you to find out particularly if anyone is trailing him. Get along."

In less than an hour the three young men had returned. Miller acted as spokesman for them. He told his story in straightforward, undecorated reportorial style, and when he had finished he handed a sheet of paper on which were some twenty-odd names, to his boss. At that very moment the telephone began to tinkle.

"Hello, Willoughby," laughed Captain Jones from the other end of the wire. "Want to know where Fogarty is?"

"Yes," replied Willoughby, "that would interest me somewhat."

"Well," continued the laughing Jones, "he's right here in my little City Hall Court House. Cell 44. Want me to tell you how he got here?"

Willoughby leaned close to the transmitter and let each word fall with a careful emphasis. "I think, Tim, that I'd rather tell *you* how he got there. You see, we newspaper men have the faculty, at times, of getting hold of little details that the police miss. Well then, Jones, our Mr. Fogarty left the office about an hour ago. He went directly to a cheap self-service restaurant on Beekman street. When he had finished his lunch, he went to the cashier's desk and laid down a check for fifty cents, and a ten dollar bill. He had received that bill from me a few moments before, in part payment of

his weekly salary. Another man—not the cashier—picked up Fogarty's bill, held it up to the light, and sneered, 'This is a damn good counterfeit, Slippery. Where did you get it?' Fogarty insisted it was genuine, and pretty soon there was an argument. Three or four others gathered round—*and one of them slipped a gun into Fogarty's pocket.* Then, at a given signal, Mike got a punch on the nose. And when he started to fight back, he was set upon by the crowd, and beaten up. And when a cop arrived, everybody, somehow, managed to get away—except Fogarty. He's in cell 44 now on the charges of disorderly conduct and carrying concealed weapons. Am I right so far?"

Jones thought it over a while. Then he snapped, "Willoughby, are you insinuating that Fogarty was framed?"

"Insinuating!" howled Willoughby. "I'm *claiming* it!"

"Say, Johnny, what's this you're giving me, anyhow?"

"I'm giving you fifteen minutes to get Fogarty back to this office. He's due at two o'clock and it's one-forty-five now."

"And suppose he isn't back by two?"

"Then there'll be an interesting story on the front page of to-morrow's Post."

"And how are you going to back up that story in case someone sues?"

"I'll back it up with a stenographic record of every word spoken at the cashier's desk. I'll back it up with three eyewitnesses to the fact that a gun was slipped into Mike's pocket. I'll back it up with the names and addresses of twenty-five persons who will swear that Fogarty did *not* strike the first blow. I'll back it up with a picture of the man who started the argument. I'll back it up with *two* pictures of that man. One of them will show how he looked disguised in the restaurant. The other will be just a plain every day picture of *Gresser*. Is Fogarty going to be back by two?"

For an answer Jones hung up the receiver.

Willoughby called him up again at three o'clock. "Captain," he said, "what's the use of acting like a stubborn mule about this business? Do you think I'd take a chance on a story like this if I wasn't absolutely sure of my ground?"

"Do you mean to tell me that Fogarty hasn't come back to your office yet?" growled the surprised Jones. "That's mighty queer, for I let him go at once!"

That night Willoughby had his man-hunt well under way. He knew, of course, that Fogarty had lost faith, that he had become discouraged by Gresser's persecution and that he had fled to some other part of the country to resume his evil ways. But Willoughby had *not* lost faith. He felt that Fogarty had been too nearly saved to be given up now. So he bent all his energies to finding the man and bringing him back.

Within a week, every newspaper office had a picture and a description of the missing "habitual." Willoughby offered a reward, and private detectives joined the hunt; all to no avail. December passed, and January, and still no word about Fogarty. And then came February, and by the twenty-third the "reformation" had to be completed!

On the twenty-first, Willoughby received the following telegram:

"F HERE IN COUNTY JAIL, NEW CITY, N. Y. CHARGE, PICKING POCKETS. WAS NOT RECOGNIZED, AND LET OFF WITH THIRTY DAYS. WILL BE RELEASED 10 A. M. FEB. 23. WIRE INSTRUCTIONS.

MILLER."

Willoughby wired back:

"STAY WHERE YOU ARE. BRADY AND HOPKINS LEAVING TO-NIGHT FOR NEW CITY. MEET THEM AT STATION.

WILLOUGHBY."

Then he got Captain Jones on the phone. "Come around to the office of the Post at one o'clock Thursday," he said. "I want to pay you that thousand."

Jones showed up on time. "Take that frown off your face," said Willoughby. "Just because you're winning my money is no reason why you should be angry at me. Sit down and help yourself to five cigars."

Jones sat down, but declined the smokes. "I'd a darn sight rather have lost that thousand and seen a soul saved," he grumbled.

Thereupon the door opened and Miller,

Brady and Hopkins entered, leading Fogarty.

"Did he put up much of a battle?" asked Willoughby.

It was Brady who answered. "It wasn't a battle. It was a war. Miller and Hopkins and I are taking the rest of the week off to add up the casualties. You'll get our bill Saturday."

Willoughby held out his right hand, but Fogarty kept his eyes on the floor.

"Come, come, Mike," commanded Willoughby, "shake hands with me. Now shake with the Captain. No, he's not going to arrest you."

"Then why," stammered Mike, "why have you brought me back?"

"The Post needs another good reporter," laughed the managing editor. "And when the Post needs a good reporter, it doesn't hesitate to kidnap him, if necessary. No use protesting, Mike. You're hired. Sit down. Smoke? Ah, I knew you couldn't refuse me. Now then, I want you to be witness to a little business transaction that's coming off between the captain and me." He faced Jones, and continued, "One year ago to-day, I made a bet with you for one thousand dollars that I could reform Fogarty. The time does not expire till three-thirty-three, and it's now but half-past two. I am ready to acknowledge, however, that I have failed. I will pay up now. Here's the money!"

Fogarty sat as though stunned. Then he jumped up excitedly. "You—you bet—on *me?*" He pushed Willoughby back and pleaded, "Don't give him the money, boss, for God's sake don't give him the money! You still have an hour—*and I can reform in an hour.* After me laying down on you—do you—do you—still—believe in me?"

"With all my heart, Mike. I am thoroughly convinced I can make a man out of you. I was merely mistaken in the matter of the time it would take."

The tears ran down the criminal's cheeks as he turned to plead with the captain.

"Give me a chance, Captain," he cried. "I can do it! I can reform in an hour. I—I can reform—*now.* Why—Captain—I *am* reformed now. I'm different, I tell you—I'm changed—"

"That was a condition of the bet," interrupted Willoughby. "Unless Jones could see the change, I was to lose."

"And—and don't you see it?" asked Fogarty. "Don't you—?"

Jones looked the "habitual" straight in the eyes, but they did not quiver. He was a hard man, was Jones, but he was an honest man too, and somehow, at that moment, he wasn't quite sure of his own emotions. "The spirit seems to be willing, Michael," he said, slowly, "but the flesh—the flesh is weak. I—I'm afraid you'll pick pockets as long as you have a good right hand."

Fogarty turned from him, dazed. Then suddenly, a strange look came into his eyes.

"I'll be back in less than an hour, Mr. Willoughby, And I'll be back—reformed," he announced, and left the room.

"What do you suppose he's going to do?" asked the managing editor.

"I don't know," replied Jones. He fidgeted about uneasily in his chair. "Isn't it a damn shame, John, that a pleasant, intelligent chap like Fogarty should be cursed with an instinctive desire to—"

His words were broken off by a terrible, piercing shriek coming from the press room on the floor below. Then came a confused yelling and shouting of orders, intermingled with oaths and cries of horror and disgust. Willoughby and Jones heard the machinery screech and crunch; then it came to a standstill.

The foreman of the press room came stumbling into the managing editor's office. "Mr. Willoughby—Fogarty put his right hand between two type cylinders! The fingers are—the hand—it's—it's—"

Willoughby and Jones bounded past the foreman and ran down the stairs into the press room. Two men were applying a tourniquet to Fogarty's right arm; another was bandaging his mangled, bleeding hand.

Fogarty faced Jones squarely and smiled. He was writhing in agony, but he smiled. "Now that my good right hand is gone, Captain Jones, I guess I won't pick any more pockets. The flesh was weak," he added, "but I think Captain Jones can *see* now that my *mind* has been changed!"

THE GRAVEN IMAGE

By ANNA BROWNELL DUNAWAY

With the assistance of Auntie Miller, the graven image becomes a broken idol.

ENERALLY speaking it takes marriage to disillusion women in regard to the baser sex. Many a spinster has gone through life cherishing an ideal, basking in the painful memory of a smile, a springing step or a curling lock, when, nine chances to one, if she had married her idol, she would have found him but a sawdust doll, an image with feet of clay. Very few ideals survive the test of lukewarm coffee, of nightly floor walking and of missing collar buttons.

Occasionally you will find wives who, while thoroughly disillusioned as to their husbands, still preserve an ideal in the person of an old flame. And on this rock has many a home been wrecked.

I do not, in my own experience, plead guilty to this feminine weakness. There was one suitor, it is true, whose upstanding pompadour used to give me so-called thrills. I fondly expected, in the course of human events, to face that pompadour every morning for life. But it was not to be. And, I cannot say that I have experienced any vain regret over it, especially since his wife has told me, in strictest confidence, that he wears rubber bands on said pompadour at night, and that, in addition, he is a selfish beast.

I am quite satisfied with Henry. Considering the fact that he will doubtless read this narrative, I cannot, with discretion, say less. But no man is a hero to his wife any more than he is to his valet. Other women's husbands—old beaux—are far more alluring. So it was in the case of Grace Warburton, a school-girl chum of mine.

It was at breakfast one spring morning, that I picked up a violet-scented, lavender-tinted letter in Grace's dainty chirography.

"You old dear," it ran:

"I am actually coming to see you after all these years. I am going to make you that long-promised visit that fate has prevented my making on one pretext or another. Of late I have been rather run down, and Joe insists that I take a rest away from the children, and forget the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. So his sister is going to look after them while I come to dear old Westerville for a week. I am as crazy as a school girl over the prospect. Just to think of going over the dear, delightful old haunts, the school campus, the gravel walk! I yearn even for the cigar store Indian and Morton's soda fountain.

But what's the use of running on when I shall see you so soon? I am leaving Friday. If it is not convenient, let me know. I suppose many of the old friends are gone, among them, Will Congleton—"

Here she had evidently broken off and signed her name hurriedly. I looked up from the letter and broke the news casually to Henry.

"We are going to have company. Grace is coming to visit."

"Grace," puzzled Henry, looking up from his paper. "'Grace, 'tis a charming sound.' Well, let 'er come, so long as it isn't mother-in-law. What for looking damsel is she?"

"Surely," I reproved, "you remember Grace Warburton, the class beauty, and my bridesmaid."

"Well I guess, yes!" exclaimed Henry

"Regular raving, tearing beauty! Whom did she marry anyway?"

Isn't that just like a man? We had been among those present at Grace's wedding, and I remembered every detail even to the ices molded in the shape of doves, and here was Henry coolly inquiring whom she married.

"Joe Pease," I reminded him coldly. "A professor—"

"Now that you mention it," interposed Henry, "I recall the august occasion. Rather a mediocre chap as I remember him. Come to think of it, Will Congleton used to be sweet on her. Wonder why they didn't hit it off?"

"They were engaged once, but—well, the usual thing. Will was fickle and they quarrelled. Grace was a long time getting over it. She stayed single for years. But I think she got a fine husband. I never could understand what she saw in Will Congleton."

"Will wasn't a bad sort," contended Henry, with a man's usual championship of his sex, "a little wild, perhaps, as any man is till his wife takes him in hand. Then he's like clay in the hands of the potter."

"So I've noticed," I observed drily, as Henry retired, chuckling, behind his newspaper.

I had not seen Grace since her wedding. At that time she had faithfully promised to visit me every year but she had not counted on the babies. Every year or so came a dainty announcement card tied with baby-blue ribbon. As Henry expressed it, they had them like rabbits. But now, after six years of exile, Grace was coming back to Westerville. I felt vaguely excited. When one has been married thirteen years, it is good to be carried back on the wings of fancy to those irresponsible years ere the bloom has left the peach, and the grasshopper become a burden.

In the old high school days, Grace had been the prettiest girl in the class; not much of a grind, but gay, sparkling, vivacious. I fully expected, as all Westerville did, that she would marry Will Congleton. The two families—Judge Warburton's and the Congletons—had been neighbors before the Judge's family moved to California. Grace and I had been chums since our first-reader days, and I could shut my eyes and see Will Congleton mischievously pulling her two little blonde braids that just met across the back of her neck.

"I just hate Willie Congleton!" she would storm, her blue eyes flashing and her little tongue sticking out vindictively.

That was my earliest picture of Grace Warburton. Now, as I sat gazing at the girlish scrawl before me, I saw another—Grace in tears, a very Niobe.

"I have given him back his ring," she whispered between sobs. "He is running everywhere with that Rystrom girl."

I tried to soothe her.

"When you are married, Grace, he will behave. He will be good to you."

"He is not good to me now," she said sadly. "He would break my heart. I will give him up, but, Nell, I shall love him always."

I wondered suddenly if the years had dealt as severely with her as with Will Congleton. He had been handsome in a coarse, voluptuous way, but of late, he had shown the marks of dissipation. For my own part I had never fancied him, perhaps because he had never fancied me. Women are that way.

"When," inquired Henry, drawing on his gloves, "does the wolf propose to descend on the fold, and, are we also to be favored with the infant class?"

"We are not," I reassured him. "And Grace will not arrive till Friday night. Plenty of time to get everything in readiness. I can hardly wait to see Grace."

"Neither can I," assured Henry, sighing like a bellows.

The train that brought Grace was late and I had a vague and sleepy impression of a modish figure with just a suggestion of Grace's old dash and charm. But at the breakfast table, the following morning, as I examined her covertly from behind the coffee urn, I thought her prettier than in her girlhood. The golden hair was parted and waved softly back to a loose, low coil where once the two little tow braids had met. The face, though thin, had a matronly expression very sweet to see, but

there were faint lines about the eyes, and the rosebud mouth had a careworn droop.

"And how did you leave Jo-Jo?" inquired Henry, eyeing admiringly the dainty figure in a charming, blue negligee.

"As well as could be expected," replied Grace demurely, and laughed. "I perceive, Nell, that Henry's manners haven't improved with age. I suppose there are very few of the old set left."

"You see before you," replied Henry, "the sole survivors, with the exception of one, William Congleton, a squire of dames—"

There was a sudden crash from the kitchen as of breaking crockery. I hastened out to find Marie, who helped me out occasionally in the kitchen, bending over the remains of my prized majolica pitcher.

"It slipped out of my hands," she gasped, her face beet-red, her eyes oddly confused. "I expect I'll get fired now."

"What's the trouble out there?" called Henry.

"Marie broke a pitcher," I said lightly. "She's scared into a dead faint, thinking you'll discharge her."

"Let 'er come to then," returned Henry. "I'm no firing squad. As I was saying, Will Congleton—"

"Is Will here?" inquired Grace in a rather constrained voice. A vivid scarlet flamed in her cheeks. I thought it odd that, after the lapse of years, she should flush at the mention of his name.

"Surest thing you know," grinned Henry, enjoying her confusion. "Still single, too. A victim of unrequited love—"

"Nonsense," I interrupted sharply. "He's had scrapes enough, goodness knows."

"The autocrat of the breakfast table," bowed Henry, designating me with an airy wave of his hand. "To resume—an Adonis like William—"

"Is he as handsome as ever?" inquired Grace, toying nervously with her grapefruit.

"As pretty as a pink," enthused Henry. "Though there be some who accuse him of using a lipstick and an eyebrow pencil. Well, so long, Nell, I must be tearing myself away. Farewell, Grace, our acquaintance has been short—"

"And sweet," supplied Grace, with a touch of her old sparkle.

Henry grinned.

"Any message, now, you might wish to send to William—"

"Henry Miller," I interposed, but already he was disappearing around the corner. Just then the telephone rang. On my way to answer it, Marie beckoned me to the kitchen.

"Answer the 'phone, please, Grace," I called from the door. "My groceryman usually calls up about this time in regard to fresh vegetables. If it is he, tell him I will put in an order shortly."

"All right," she laughed, and took down the receiver. I dismissed my back door caller and re-entered the dining room to hear Grace's voice ring out in a silvery peal of laughter.

"Cabbage head?" she was saying in a girlish voice. "Why, perhaps I might consider a nice, firm cabbage head. Oh, really? Yes, Mrs. Joseph Pease, she that was Grace Warburton.... Why, how nice. At the Normal Cash Grocery? Just a week —yes, lovely.... Why—e-e-yes, I would like to see you again.... Not to-night—engagement.... I really can't tell now. In the meantime, no doubt I will meet you somewhere.... Yes, seems like old times. Good-bye—yes, yes—good-bye."

"Up to your old tricks," I teased, "flirting with my staid, old reliable grocer—"

She flung around from the telephone and faced me, her face a lovely riot of color. I am, no doubt, old-fashioned, but it struck me as curious that I should see that tell-tale flush on the face of a wife who was also a mother.

"Nell," she cried, "it was Will—Will Congleton! You didn't tell me he owned your leading grocery—"

"He," I began, and stopped short. As a matter of fact, he merely clerked for the owner, even occasionally acting as delivery boy in rush seasons. But if she still cared, after all these years, why disillusion her? After all, they might not meet—

"Oh," she continued, her eyes glowing, "it seemed good to hear his voice again. And, Nell, he insists on seeing me. He tried to make an engagement with me for

this evening. But of course, I put him off. You know how Westerville would talk. Besides, I must think of Joe and the children." She clasped her hands in her lap nervously. "Nell, I am going to 'fess up. I've got to tell somebody. It sounds like treason when I've got such a good husband, but—I have never got over caring for Will Congleton."

"Humph," I said shortly. But she did not seem to notice. She stared into the grate with a tender, reminiscent look shining in her eyes.

"I married Joe because he had cared so long—and for a home. I was tired of being buffeted around from pillar to post. After father and mother went west, and I went to teaching in a distant city, I was fairly devoured with homesickness and longing. My little room seemed like a prison. I used to take long walks out on the residence streets just to catch glimpses of homes and cozy firesides. And, always, in every crowd, I saw Will Congleton. If I boarded a street car, I saw his face among the throng. It obsessed me. Sometimes I started forward, convinced that I had met him face to face."

She seemed to be talking to herself, quite unconscious of my presence.

"The night we quarreled," she went on musingly, "I wore a bunch of lilies of the valley. He spoke of them and of their fragrance. He took one spray and tucked it in his pocket—next his heart, he said, with the old, whimsical smile. And all the time I knew that only the night before, he had taken Gladys Rystrom in his arms and kissed her."

"How did you know?" I threw in bluntly.

"Gladys told me herself. That was what hurt me so. She boasted of her conquest. felt that if he were not true to me then, when we were engaged, he would not be true after our marriage." She caught her breath with a little sigh and went on in an expressionless voice. "And I knew Joe would be true. He is. He is the best of husbands. But—if I could know once again that wild, sweet thrill—"

"Joe is a prince among men," I cried hotly, "and worth ten of Will Congleton!"

"What a champion he has in you, Nell." She smiled, but the smile was forced. "He is good. I think of him as Bunyan's Mr. Greatheart. But—he will always be the same old grind. He will never get anywhere. He has not Will's push and brilliance of intellect. I always knew that Will would succeed and I am rather surprised that Westerville is big enough to hold him."

"I believe," I said, concealing a wicked smile, "that it can't hold him long."

"So I thought," murmured Grace. "He must feel that his wings are clipped here. Not that—oh, you know what I mean, Nell. He is cut out for high places."

I could hardly restrain a snort, but Grace had taken up the thread of her reminiscences.

"I stood the loneliness and the unrest for six years and then I married Joe. I wanted a home. I wanted to make cunning drop cakes in a spotless kitchen instead of eating solitary luncheons. I used to dream about snowy loaves of bread and rows of jam pots. And so—"

"And aren't you happy?" I demanded. "You have everything—home—children—why feed on husks of memory?"

Her face lit up with a wonderful light. She looked like a Madonna.

"The children," she breathed. "Oh, yes, they make it worth while—the sacrifice."

"Sacrifice?" I repeated incredulously. Hot words trembled on my tongue, but I bit my lips and remained silent. As I have before observed, one is not married thirteen years for nothing. If Grace persisted in looking upon Will as an idol second only to Baal, why, let the illusion rest.

But I confess that I was much shaken by her confession. I decided that the sooner Grace beheld her idol in the flesh, the better for all concerned. So it chanced that that very afternoon saw us headed for Westerville's shopping section, with the Normal Cash Grocery as my objective point.

Grace looked perfectly charming and our expedition partook of the nature of a triumphal procession. Everybody stopped for a word of greeting, and it was late when we finally turned in at the grocery store. It was a busy hour. One glance

assured me that the stage was all set. Groups of people stood forlornly about impatient to be waited on. Tired, bedraggled women they were, for the most part, haggling over the prices of butter and eggs.

"Where is Mr. Congleton?" I inquired of a clerk who was staring at Grace with mouth agape. And I couldn't blame him. Even Henry would have taken a second look. She was all in brown, and a single pink rose nestled against the gold of her hair. She looked like a girl of eighteen instead of the mother of four.

"Back in the store somewhere," he said briefly, indicating the direction with a dripping salt mackerel.

"Probably in his private office," murmured Grace, picking up her skirts daintly. But we walked to the end of the store where stood boxes and barrels, without catching a glimpse of Will Congleton. No one was in sight but a tow-headed clerk handing a particular customer a taste of butter on a splinter. However, from a near-by barrel, projected a pair of short legs clad in striped trousers. They waved frantically in mid-air as the owner extricated himself from the depths of the barrel.

"The cranberries are getting low," he explained apologetically to the butter customer. "I had to scrap the bottom." I looked twice before I could assure myself that the striped legs belonged to Will Congleton. I had not interested myself in his physique of late years, but I preserve a pleasing memory of a dapper, slender figure. It was evident that Mr. Congleton had taken on flesh. He was, to use a Westerville idiom, pussy. His fat cheeks sagged with lines of dissipation. A stubby, three days growth of reddish beard gave him an unkempt appearance. A stub of cigar protruded from the corner of his tobacco-stained mouth.

Alas, how are the mighty fallen! I looked at Grace. In her eyes I saw a sort of frozen horror. She plucked my sleeve and turned to flee; but it was too late. The knight of the cranberries dropped his quart measure with a bang and thrust forward a grimy hand.

"Why, if it isn't Grace Warburton," he ejaculated. "Little Gracie, 'pon my word! Blooming as a rose and not a day older! Say, Grace"—he leaned forward ingratiatingly—"cut that engagement to-night, can't you? I must see you. Remember that night, Grace, and those lilies of the valley—"

"A can of sock-eye sall-mon," broke in an acid voice impatiently, "if you've got them cranberries tied up yet. I've got eight mile to drive—"

"Yes, ma'am," spoke Mr. Congleton hurriedly, diving around the corner. "See you later, Grace," he called, leaning over the counter familiarly.

But Grace merely bowed coldly. With her head high she pressed forward through the mob of customers. As we reached the door, we heard the sound of the acid voice raised in protest:

"I ain't a-goin' to take no clerk's word on the price of eggs, young man. Show me the proprietor."

Once outside, Grace laughed hysterically.

"Oh, Nell, Nell!" she gasped. "What must you think of me! And that was my ideal! Why didn't you tell me?"

"Seeing is believing," I said succinctly. "So do most of our idols crumble into dust. Even in this enlightened age we cling to ancient rites. We worship many a golden calf."

"I have worshiped a calf indeed," said she, with fine self-scorn.

We had hardly taken off our wraps when a messenger boy came with a special delivery letter for Grace. She tore it open, read it and sank on the couch with a sob.

"It's from Joe," she cried, tossing the letter to me. "I thought one of the children was ill or something. Oh, I don't deserve him—I don't deserve him—dwelling all these years on the memory of a man who is not fit to untie his shoes! Read it, read every word."

"But," I hesitated—

"There is nothing Joe writes that the world may not read," she said with a sort of fierce pride. So I read as follows:

"Dearest Wife,

Everything is going beautifully, and you mustn't worry a bit but have a good rest. We had biscuits for breakfast—not like yours—and Jane burns

the beans regularly. The kiddies are as good as gold, though John got spanked yesterday for trying to bury the family cat alive. Dot had her arm slightly dislocated in a free-for-all with Brother. She is resting easy at this writing and consoling herself with a quarter's worth of licorice which Sadie bought for her and had charged. Sadie is a great little Dame Durden. Gee, but we miss you! But have a good rest, little girl. We are fine and dandy.

By the way, I have an offer from a leading magazine for a series of physicological articles. And I am saving my best news for the last. I am tendered a chair at my dear old Alma Mater at double my present salary. So you see, dear, our ships are coming in. I have accepted, knowing that you would want me to advance in my profession. But there is plenty of time to think about moving. After the glories of Westerville I presume Charles City will pall on you. But, remember, we couldn't get along without you, girlie, not one of us—least of all your old grind of a husband,

Joe."

I am not given to tears but I'll admit my eyes were brimming when I handed Grace back the letter.

"Oh, Grace," I cried, "blessed of women!"

And would you believe it, we couldn't coax Grace to stay another day.

"Think of the licorice," she insisted tremulously, "and the dislocated arm and poor Grey-fur, the family cat."

But I knew it was something else. At the last moment she clung to me and whispered:

"I can never make it up to him—never, if I live to be a hundred!"

"Methinks," observed Henry, as we walked home together, "that the fair Grace is quite en rapport with friend husband."

"As well she might be," I responded tartly.

Just then, a couple passed us. In the half light, I thought I recognized Marie, my maid.

"I am sure that was Marie," I whispered. "Could you tell who was with her?"

"Our mutual friend," said Henry, with a chuckle, "Will Congleton."

"Wretch!" I exclaimed with rising gorge.

"It is to be hoped," was Henry's complacent comment, "that when a few more false ideals become shattered, down-trodden husbands will be appreciated as they deserve."

And on Henry's judgment, which is not half bad, considering, I rest my case.

THE HARBINGER

By ERNEST ELWOOD STANFORD

The arrival of Benoni's bluebirds is a doubtful sign of spring, until later events prove conclusively that the mating season has arrived.

BENONI KEMP stood in the open doorway, his gray head cocked sidewise and his mouth slightly open. A little man, was Benoni, a good bit beyond the prime of life, but still, as he himself asserted, in good order. He was a wrinkled little man, not gnarled, but slightly bent, with blue eyes beneath bushy brows, blue eyes that twinkled even at funerals, yet held a hint of deeper feeling, of sadness even. His upper lip and cheeks were shaven, but his chin sported a tiny gray beard of the shoe-brush order, which, when his mouth closed, stuck forth at an aggressive angle, the only aggressive thing about him. Benoni's mission in the doorway was plain. Benoni was listening.

"Chee-e-e-e-rup! Che-e-e-e-rup-eerup-eerup-eerup!"

It was faint and far away, across the snow-clad fields. An ordinary listener would hardly have caught it. But Benoni Kemp had listened for the bluebirds for very many years.

"It's him! It's sure him! Two full days earlier'n last year. Well, well! Spring's a-comin'!"

Benoni's bluebirds always ushered in the spring. When he heard one in the distance —according to Benoni, it was always the same one—spring was coming. When the birds appeared in the orchard in numbers, it was well on the way. When the Ol' Settler and his wife began to carry into the old original bird house the sticks and straws that always seemed necessary to repair the nest, or build it over, spring had come. The almanac might place the date differently; the snow might all go away before, or come "three feet at a stretch" afterward; Benoni knew when spring had arrived. It was his firm belief that the same Ol' Settler had occupied that first box each of the thirty years it had been there, and that it was his descendents that peopled the other bird houses whose numbers increased yearly in the orchard. Of course it was. Benoni could tell the Ol' Settler's voice as far as he could hear it. As to the continuous identity of the Ol' Settler's wife, Benoni was noncommittal. He was a bachelor, and uncertain of the ways of women.

As Benoni stood there, a man came out of the house below. He was a young man, some thirty-odd, and he walked briskly through the new-fallen snow. His walk stamped him as a brisk young man, and a man of decision, too. His hair was black; so also was his mustache.

"Morning, Uncle Ben!"

"Mornin', Johnny. Spring's a-comin', Johnny. I've hearn the Ol' Settler."

The man in the road laughed pleasantly. "A storm's coming, too. It'll snow again to-night."

"Let 'er storm. Spring 'll soon be here."

A little way up the road—it had no claim to the term of street—a young woman approached. As the man passed on and neared her, she turned as if to cross the road. But the man forestalled her. Plunging into the new-fallen snow, he gained the opposite footpath that passed for a sidewalk, stamped the snow from his trouser-legs, and went on without looking backward or sidewise. The woman turned back into the path and came on.

"Good morning, Uncle Ben!"

"Mornin', Em'ly, Spring's a-comin'." The Ol' Settler's here."

The woman smiled. She seemed hardly

more than a girl, a girl of few-and-twenty.

"Look out for storms," she called. "Your Ol' Settler always brings one."

"A clearin' storm," prophesied Uncle Ben. "Spring 'll soon be here."

"Folks is funny," he mused. "Folks is sure funny. I'll bet they ain't spoke in five year. An' before that—before that—I had the spoons all bought—silver spoons with an 'F' on 'em like the man said, though it did seem like a 'B' would be more sensible. I've got em yet.... Thirty year ago, it was, I put that box in the orchard. Nary a bluebird came here afore. The Ol' Settler an' his wife, they come that year, an' every year since. An' now the orchard's full o' birds. I wonder if birds ever have tiffs an' tantrums? S'posin', thirty year ago, the Ol' Settler an' she that's his wife— Jus' s'posin'—"

The clouds rolled up in the evening. The storm endured for a night, and then passed. In the thawing light of the morning the bluebirds sang in the orchard.

"Back again, Ol' Settler. Well, you ain't wasted any time. The box is there, Ol' Settler, like it's been for thirty year. I've put a lot more boxes in the orchard, same's I allus do. Tell the children, Ol' Settler."

The evening was a summer evening. In the early dusk Benoni sat in the doorway, watching the turbid streamlets that carried yesterday's sullied snow along the roadside. John Britton he could see in the window of his house, some rods down the road. Away beyond in the dusk a woman's figure approached. Benoni's eyes had searched for bluebirds for many years. Though old, they were wondrous keen.

"Em'ly—Em'ly Fearn!"

Benoni rose rheumatically and got a ladder from the shed. He slopped clumsily across the road, and placed the ladder against the tree trunk that held the Ol' Settler's bird house. He climbed the ladder slowly and busied himself about the lichen-covered box.

Emily Fearn walked thoughtfully up the roadside, beside the current of what should have been a side-path. A hoarse yell arrested her. Glancing up, she added to it a full-voiced scream, whose ending was suddenly drowned in a tremendous splash.

Half way across the road, old Benoni opened his eyes. He was being carried, swiftly. Strong arms felt good. Someone walked beside.

"That snow was harder'n I'd thought," murmured Benoni, half-consciously, "an' awful wet."

"What?" Two voices spoke that rarely were heard together.

"Huh-uh?" Benoni's wits came back. "My goodness! My ankle hurts!"

They helped him into the darkening house, and John Britton removed his wet clothes and got him into bed while Emily heated water on the kitchen stove.

"You stay with me, Em'ly, while John goes for the doctor. I guess mebbe I'm killed."

"Nonsense, Uncle Ben. We—I won't let you die. Oh, your poor, mussed-up pillow!"

She hovered over him, doing the many little things which only a woman's hands can do for a sick or injured man. Benoni smiled with great content.

"D'ye know, Em'ly, nobody's done that sort of thing f'r me f'r forty years—since Mother died. There was one that might have. But I was a fool, and awful, stubborn fool. I think now she'd 'a' forgive me—if I'd asked her. She would, if she'd knowed what it's meant to me, through all the years. But I wouldn't bend. Forty years—it ain't nice, Em'ly, for a man to grow old alone, with nothin' but thoughts an' thoughts o' what might 'a' been, with no human thing to care for ye an' keep ye human. I might 'a' been killed a hundred times, I guess, an' nobody 'd cared. But I ain't kicked much. I've had the Ol' Settler. *He's* raised me a fam'ly—only birds, o' course, but they've helped some."

The girl had turned to the window, and did not look back as the old man's voice trailed off.

When the doctor had pronounced Benoni sound save for a twisted ankle, Emily slipped silently away. But John remained for a space.

"What ever made you climb that tree, at such a time of night, Uncle Benoni?"

Benoni smiled faintly, and his eyes roved.

"Oh, there was just a nest that needed

fixin'. You wouldn't think, John, how much them birds have been to me. They're all the fam'ly I've got, an' I'm an old man—an old, lone man, John, with nothin' but years o' wasted life, with nobody to carry my name, nor my work when I'm done with it. The Ol' Settler, he's had his own, an' he's worked for 'em an' fed 'em an' fought for 'em an' protected 'em. He's filled the orchard with song, an' that song o' his 'll go on forever, I suppose.... Good night, John. You might look in in the mornin'."

The next morning, rather early, Benoni's breakfast came on a tray—a silver tray with white napkin and dainty china. Benoni grinned feebly.

"I'm obleeged," he said. "I guess you'd been put to it to find a clean dish in *my* house."

"You poor Uncle Ben! I'm going right out and wash them all for you. Call me if you want anything."

The door closed behind her. Presently another opened, the door toward the road.

"Hello, Uncle Ben!"

The rattling in the kitchen hushed suddenly. Benoni trembled. The kitchen door key was safe under his pillow, but after John had entered the bedroom she might escape through the other.

"Anything you want? Anything I can get for you?" asked John, as he entered.

Benoni crooked his forefinger.

"John!" he whispered hoarsely. "They's somethin' in the kitchen I wish you'd get. You'll know it when you see it. Wait a minute—wait, I say! It ain't anythin' for me. It's for you—somethin' you've wanted a long time. Hurry up, John!"

The door to the kitchen opened and closed. There was silence out there for a space. Then faint sounds came.

"Emily, I've been a fool—an awful fool. Can you forgive me? I've always wanted you—only you."

The words came very faintly, but Benoni had harked to the distant mating call of the Ol' Settler for many years, and his ears were wondrous keen.

"John, there's nothing to forgive, unless you forgive me. Will you, John?"

With a blissful smile Benoni sank back upon the pillow and thrust a stubby finger in each ear. Presently the outer door opened. Half-rising, he saw them walking down the roadside, hand in hand, unashamed, in the broad daylight. Above and beyond, in a tree where a ladder had lately stood, perched a bright bluebird, with a straw in his beak. As Benoni looked, his mate, in soberer garb, reached from the old gray box and took the straw.

"Spring's come," said Benoni Kemp.

ON PIER NINETY-SEVEN

By JAMES FRANCES DWYER

The watchman at pier ninety-seven sees things which the average man can see only by soaking for a week in spiritus frumenti.

ETER, the night watchman, sat in his shanty at the end of Pier 97 and toasted his feet at the small stove. There was a storm raging outside. Down the river charged the shrieking blasts of the blizzard, and the timbers of the pier groaned before the onslaught. The tramp steamer, Light of Asia, rubbed her sunbitten sides against the shivering piles.

"It's a good job that old tub is safe inside on a night like this," soliloquized the watchman. "It's a wonder to me how old Cap Rudolph can run her backward and forwards on the Almighty's big oceans. Seems as if one punch from a big wave would stave her sides in."

The door of the shanty was pushed open at that moment, and a tall, gray-haired man stumbled into the little shelter.

"Hello, Peter!" he cried, loudly. "I thought I'd come and keep you company for a while."

"Why, Captain Rudolph! I'm real glad," said the watchman. "I was just sitting here thinking about you an' the old steamer. I was saying to myself—here, Captain, sit over here."

"No, I'm all right here," said the gray-haired man. "I'll climb on top of this molasses barrel an' I'll be nice and cozy."

"Well, I was saying to myself that it's a wonder how Captain Rudolph dodges all the perils of the deep."

"Ay, ay," growled the seaman. "The perils of the deep an' all the other perils, Peter."

Peter glanced up questioningly. "It *is* true?" he queried.

"Ay, it's true, Peter," answered Rudolph. "The cowards bolted an hour ago. Every one of 'em except the two mates an' the engineers. The thing got on their nerves. Seamen are the biggest cowards in the world on some things."

"But I—I," stammered Peter, "I thought it was just a yarn that some one had made up."

"Wish it was," snapped Captain Rudolph. "I wish it was, Peter. I had some good boys on that boat, an' now I'll have to take any longshore loafer that comes along."

Peter's little eyes blinked in the light that came from a ship's lantern hanging from the beam above his head. His face showed intense excitement. The stubby fingers writhed around each other as he glanced at the tall man on the molasses barrel.

"An' they were aboard," he muttered. "I mean they were aboard loose."

"Loose is the word, Peter," said the captain. "They were loose all right."

"How did it happen?" asked the watchman.

"Well, is was this way," explained the skipper of the tramp. "We picked up the consignment at Singapore. Twenty-seven monkeys, three orang-outangs, a leopard, and these three that are loose, as you remarked. A greasy Shan looked after the monkeys and the orang-outangs; a tattooed Siamese was valet to the leopard and the three that are loose.

"Four days out from Singapore those two devils started to fight. The Shan reckoned the Siamese was teasing his monkeys, the Siamese complained of the Shan for throwing dirty water over him. White men are hard to deal with, Peter, but nigs are the limit. You can't knock any sense into a nigger's head. No, sir!

Sense just whistles in one ear and out the other because there's nothing there to stop it.

"I bumped their heads together, and that didn't improve things. Never take to the sea, Peter. Things that happen on the sea would drive a nervous man like you mad. The sea is for the man without imagination, Peter. Stay right here in your cozy little box and laugh at the stories that bad-tempered skippers spin to you."

"But the story," murmured the watchman. "What happened after you bumped their heads together?"

"What happened?" repeated the captain. "Faith, the very devil himself happened to the ship after that, my boy. That greasy brute of a Shan smashed the box in which those three were imprisoned, and the next minute they had disappeared. You have never seen a hamadryad or giant cobra, have you, Peter? No, you haven't. Well, they're not nice brutes to have anything to do with. Mother o' me! No! And those three were nine feet long, and as poisonous as they're made. They're the biggest horrors on the Malay, Peter. Takes about a hundred natives to catch one of 'em, an' they're scared stiff all the time they're roping 'em in."

"An' you didn't see where they went to?" asked Peter.

"See?" cried the skipper. "See? No, Peter! We had no chance to see. The Siamese gave a yell, and before we knew what he was yelling about, those three things had found cover. Found it slicker than a Sioux Indian. That's their game, and nine feet of snake can move mighty hurriedly when it knows that the atmosphere is not healthy. You wouldn't think that twenty-seven feet of snake could get under cover in three seconds, but I'm telling you the truth. We couldn't see any sign of that trinity when we started to hunt for them, and every second of that hunt was giving us thrills up and down our spinal column. We had cold feet, and they were getting colder as we hunted. You bet they were. You never saw a hamadryad, my boy. He's the boss of the snake tribe, an' he knows it.

"Night flopped down on us, and those three were still loose. Loose is a good word, Peter. They were somewhere on that old tramp, and we were mighty careful how we moved around. Those sailors didn't want to go on deck. What do you think of that? They were scared stiff. They walked around like dancing masters, one doing the work, and a mate holding a lantern to scare off the snake. One big Swede thought he saw one of the snakes an' the blamed idiot nearly broke his neck tumbling down the companionway. You can bet your last nickel that the watch didn't go to sleep that night."

"It was terrible," muttered Peter.

"You're right, Peter," said the skipper. "It was more than terrible. It was stupendously terrible, if I might use the words that way. Twenty-seven feet of snake stowed away in some part of the old tramp, an' the blamed crew walking round on tiptoe, with their eyes nearly popping out of their heads. That Siamese made matters worse. He locked himself in a cabin an' refused to come out. He reckoned that the snakes would make a special set at him because he was their jailer, an' he told things through the keyhole about those snakes that put those lubbers of sailors off their feed. Thompson, the first mate, wanted a few of 'em to volunteer for a search in the cargo, but they weren't on. Not a one of 'em would tackle the job. When he ordered them down, the cusses refused to obey, an' Sheol was mighty near loose on that deck."

"I don't blame 'em," said Peter.

"Course you don't," said the tramp captain. "You're scared of snakes, too. I'll admit that twenty-seven feet of snake isn't a nice thing to be loose on board a ship, but it wasn't my fault. It was the fault of the blamed niggers, but larruping that big Shan didn't get those three back into their boxes. Not much. Those reptiles were stowed away in some corner of that craft, and all our searching couldn't bring them out. Would you have liked a passage with us, Peter?"

"No! No!" gurgled the watchman. "Your story turns me sick. No, I wouldn't ship on a boat that carried snakes. Why, you

can't—you can't get away from them if they get out of their boxes."

"That's right, Peter," laughed the captain of the steamer. "You can't hop overboard, can you? And the blamed snakes won't. The snake has enough sense to know that it is a mighty big swim to the shore. Why a Texan steer knows that much. I've pushed five hundred steers overboard when the old Lady Bountiful struck a rock off the coast of Newfoundland, and those steers knew that they were facing the big water. My, didn't they! They bellowed like the mischief when the cattle punchers pushed an' pricked them, an' those—"

"You told me about them," interrupted the watchman. "You told me that months ago. I want to hear about the snakes."

"Well, there's nothing to hear about them," said the captain shortly. "I wish there was. They're in the cargo or they've climbed on to the wharf an' sloped uptown. The mob think that they're still in the cargo. That's why the lubbers cleared out this evening. They're scared stiff as I told you. Four weeks of uncertainty put their nerves on the blink, an' when they got a chance to bolt to-night, why they took it. Now I must be off to see what sort of mob I can rustle up to shift her cargo in the morning. You come around if you want to see one of those blamed hamadryads, Peter. I bet those three pesky reptiles are stowed away in the cargo unless they were cunning enough to sniff land and hop off in the dark. Good-night, Peter. If you want to see a real big cobra come around in the morning when I get some plucky guys busy at the hatches."

The gray-haired skipper opened the door and passed out into the night, leaving Peter to ponder over the tale. Peter had heard that the crew had deserted the Light of Asia, and now he knew that he had heard no idle rumor.

"Three of 'em, nine feet long," he muttered, addressing the stove. "An' him sitting up there on top of that molasses barrel telling me about it like as if they were three insects instead of—"

Peter stopped, his eyes fixed upon the floor, his mouth wide open. *In the shadows at the side of the barrel, something was moving!*

Peter jerked his head forward and gave a gurgle of horror. He attempted to rise, but his legs refused to obey the order his brain flashed to them. He attempted to lift himself by clasping the arms of the battered chair, but his arms lacked the strength. And out of the shadows something was creeping swiftly across the floor towards him!

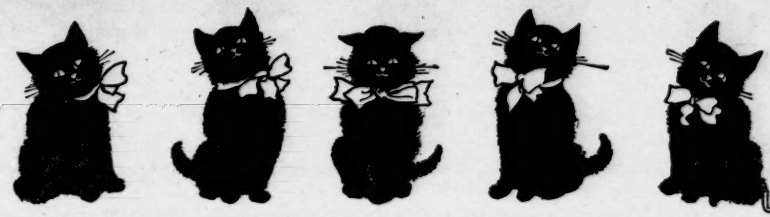
Peter attempted to cry out, but his dry tongue refused to fashion the call for help. The thing was between him and the door. The faint light from the ship's lantern fell upon the smooth, shining surface of the approaching horror, and the stubby fingers attempted to drive their nails into the palms of his hands as he watched. Straight towards him it came. There was no escape. The perspiration ran down his face. The most venomous snake in the world, Captain Rudolph had said. Nine feet long! The devilish creeping thing seemed to know that the man was at its mercy. Slowly but surely it covered the space that separated the battered chair from the barrel, and Peter gasped like a drowning man.

"Oh—Oh," he gurgled. "Help! Help! *Help!*"

It was the skipper of the Light of Asia who was the first to make the discovery. He dashed into the little shanty at five o'clock the next morning, but the moment he put his foot inside the door he slipped forward on his face and hands, and the shanty echoed to a seafaring vocabulary that had earned Rudolph a reputation throughout the Orient.

"What the ——— ———!" he shrieked, scrambling to his feet. "Why the ——— ——— molasses has run all over the floor. Peter! Peter! You sleepy idiot, wake up. I must have kicked the plug out of this barrel when I jumped off it last night. Hey, Peter! What the dickens? Something's wrong! Peter! Peter! *Peter! Wake up!*"

But Peter the watchman slept on, his eyes fixed on the middle of the black, shining pool that covered the shanty floor.



The Black Cat Club

IT IS nearly twenty years now since the BLACK CAT purchased a story from Jack London at a time when, despairing of success, he was about to go back to coal-heaving. Many are familiar with this incident which was of so much importance to the literary world; and it is a well known fact among writers that the BLACK CAT has, during every year since that time, held to its policy of encouraging young writers. Many other writers. whose names are familiar to all magazine readers, started their careers by writing stories for the BLACK CAT. Among them are Alice Hegan Rice, Rupert Hughes, Harry Stilwell Edwards, Will N. Harben, Geraldine Bonner, Sewell Ford, Holman F. Day, Cleveland Moffett, Juliet Wilbur Thompkins, Ellis Parker Butler and, to mention some of the more recent arrivals among the top-notchers, James Francis Dwyer, Ida M. Evans, Hapsburg Liebe, William Hamilton Osborne, and William J. Neidig.

The editors of the BLACK CAT are constantly receiving manuscripts that are apparently the first and only efforts of writers who look with longing eyes upon authorship as a profession, but haven't the courage to keep eternally at it. It never occurs to many of them that in the writing game, as in any other profession, it is necessary to serve an apprenticeship. They are a long time in finding out the first rule—that only by steeping themselves in technique can they master the art of short-story writing. Nothing is of more importance to the beginner. Once mastered, it can be forgotten, or at least become a part of the writer's equipment which he uses unconsciously in every piece of imaginative writing.

There is no better way to learn to write than by analyzing the work of other writers. Thus, it was to help the aspiring writer to a quicker understanding of short-story principles that the BLACK CAT CLUB was started a little more than two years ago. The idea of the Club is very simple. Briefly, if offers the writer an opportunity to master technique by study and criticism of BLACK CAT stories.

Heretofore, the Club has conducted monthly contests. Up to last October, when the contests were discontinued, prizes were awarded each month for the best criticisms, and a composite review was published in each number. These prize contests, as they were conducted, entailed a great deal of labor which it will be possible to eliminate under the present plan. All readers who are interested in short-story criticism, whether they aspire to authorship or not, may become members if they subscribe to the conditions imposed by the Club. First, to simplify matters, members are not required, as formerly, to criticise every story in a single number of the magazine. They may select any story that appeals to them, or more than one if they so desire. Each criticism should be as nearly as possible in the form of a finished essay. It may be breezy and whimsical, or a severely plain exposition; but it should be more than a mere synopsis, and it must not exceed five hundred words. Criticisms should be mailed to the BLACK CAT not later than the tenth of the month following the month of issue; i. e., criticisms of this number (March) should be mailed not later than April 10. *The best criticisms will be paid for at the rate of one cent per word* and will be published, with the names of the authors, in the third issue following, which in this case will be the June number.

Readers who are members of the Club are enthusiastic in their praise of its helpfulness. Several have had stories published in the BLACK CAT and other magazines since they became members. Some have had more than one story published in the BLACK CAT, and one of these has also won enough prize money to pay for a Liberty Bond.

Membership is open to all who are willing to subscribe to the magazine. The subscription price is $1.50 per year, and this entitles the member to a handsome Club emblem in addition to the privilege of criticising the stories in each issue. No criticisms will be returned to the writers, and if acknowledgment of the receipt of a criticism is desired postage must be enclosed with the manuscript.

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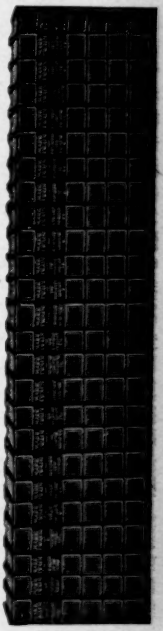

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